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Pretty Posies: The Colonial Revival's Influence on the Use of Flowers in Historic Interiors

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PRETTY POSIES:
THE COLONIAL REVIVAL'S INFLUENCE ON THE USE
OF FLOWERS IN HISTORIC INTERIORS

Gay Elizabeth Vietzke

A THESIS

in

The Graduate Program in Historic Preservation

Presented to the faculties of the University of Pennsylvania in
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MASTER OF SCIENCE

1992

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Flowers seem intended for the solace of ordinary humanity. Children love them; quiet, tender, contented, ordinary people love them as they grow; luxurious and disorderly people rejoice in them gathered. They are the cottager's treasure, and, in the crowded town, mark, as with a little broken fragment of rainbow, the windows of the workers, in whose hearts rest the covenant of peace. To the child and the girl, to the peasant and manufacturing operative, to the grisette and the nun, the lover and the monk, they are precious always.

-John Ruskin

From *Every Woman her own Flower Gardener* by Daisy Eyebright,
4th edition, H.T. Williams, publisher, 1874.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

This study began in the classroom. During a course on the American Interior before 1830, I facetiously asked about a large flower arrangement sitting on a central gate-leg table in a late 17th-century kitchen. Although everyone knew it looked greatly out of place, a more appropriate solution eluded the class. Several visits to period rooms and house museums followed and again, flower arrangements in historic settings were questioned. Secondary sources relied heavily on European practices. It became clear that this issue deserved further study.

I began, therefore, to develop a bibliography of primary source material and a chronology of cut flower use in American interiors of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. I also wrote letters to forty-eight house museums, chosen for their location and interpretive dates.¹ I inserted queries in *The Magazine Antiques* and the newsletter for the American Association for State and Local History.² There were a limited number of historical American prints and paintings that showed cut flowers. Gardening manuals from the colonial era offered limited information, although there were several references to flower use. I consulted pattern books, diaries, and estate inventories, all dating before 1800, and again found limited information. As responses to my letters arrived, I began to realize that few sites had the time or staff to research such a minute detail

¹ For a full list of these institutions see Appendix One.

² For a list of the responses received see Appendix Two.

of interpretation. The responses indicated an interest in my study, but were unable to site specific documentation for flower use at any of the historic sites. When I consulted the few books written within the last fifty years on historical flower arranging, I was surprised to find the bibliographies filled with other twentieth-century sources. One correspondent urged me to stay away from these secondary sources lest I inadvertently "perpetuate myths already in circulation."³

With each step I took I became more aware that I was running into that national nostalgia known as the Colonial Revival. I quickly realized that the time and effort required to uncover actual seventeenth- and eighteenth-century flower use was far beyond the scope of a master's thesis. If I were ever to understand cut flower use in American interiors before the Revolution, I would first have to come to grips with the "accepted interpretation" of these practices as defined by the Colonial Revival. The earlier seventeenth- and eighteenth-century primary source material was not discarded, but it was used to understand what the practitioners of the Colonial Revival were looking at and how they might have misunderstood or misinterpreted it. I have continued to research the colonial period, but the emphasis here will be on the Colonial Revival.

A new methodology was developed. I gathered as many twentieth-century sources as possible that purportedly described authentic flower use in colonial interiors or explained how to create genuine eighteenth-century bouquets at home. These sources

³ Heather Palmer, Collections Specialist at Decatur House, Washington, DC, letter to author, September 30, 1991.

included books, periodicals and household guides that promoted Colonial Revival designs. Several "cultural hearths" of Colonial Revival ideas where flowers were used extensively were studied in greater detail. The two sites included in this study are Colonial Williamsburg and the Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum and Gardens.

Many nineteenth-century developments relating to the availability and use of cut flowers were pertinent to my argument. These topics include the development of horticultural and floriculture, the proliferation of plant materials in the nineteenth-century home, and the influence of Japanese flower arranging technique on Americans.

Finally, a set of recommendations was developed for the small house museum. It is in this area, that I believe this study will be of the most help to interpreters of historic American interiors.

CHAPTER 2

The Colonial Revival

Flowers in General Attitudes Towards the Past

The Colonial Revival movement produced a legacy that is still strongly felt today. The abundance of spinning wheels and other "colonial" symbols found in house museums across the United States confirms this theory. Flower arrangements are yet another convention, although because of their ephemeral nature, they are rarely recognized as an element typical of the Colonial Revival. Flowers were a part of the movement from the very beginning. They were illustrated in the prints and paintings that popularized the movement; they were written about by the major proponents of the movement; they were accepted as characteristic of the eighteenth-century interior.

Some of the earliest examples of cut flowers being included among the furnishings of historic interiors were the Colonial Kitchens featured at Sanitary Fairs and Exhibitions during the second half of the nineteenth century. The kitchens were intended "to show how people lived a hundred years earlier by exhibiting furnishings, food, decor, and costume, and by staging planned activities."¹ They were some of the most popular exhibits at these events. Contemporary descriptions of the interior furnishings mentioned "grandfather" clocks, spinning wheels, cupboards, pewter utensils, tables, chairs,

¹ Rodris Roth, "The New England, or 'Old Tyme,' Kitchen Exhibit at Nineteenth-Century Fairs," *The Colonial Revival in America*, Alan Axelrod, ed., (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1985) 159.

and candlesticks.² Yet illustrations of the Knickerbocker Kitchen at the New York City fair of 1864, also showed flowers in small pots on the columns' chair rails and what appear to be flower horns mounted on the mantel shelf.³ The Centennial Exposition, commonly regarded as the event that sparked the Colonial Revival, included flowers in one of its most visited attractions. Views of the New England Kitchen at the Centennial clearly show a large basket of flowers on the central gate-leg table.⁴

Prints and images of our colonial past also included bouquets of flowers. One of the best known paintings of this sort was *The Old Clock on the Stairs*, 1868, painted by Edward Lamson Henry in which a small nosegay rests on a drop-leaf table in the hall leading to a tall case clock--itself a symbol of the Colonial Revival.⁵ More accessible images--such as commercially framed, ready-to-hang chromolithographs of Revolutionary characters--sometimes contained flowers in the background. A Betsy Ross image dating from 1890-1900 illustrated two large bouquets of flowers on either end of the fireplace mantel as a backdrop to the well known flag-making scene.⁶

Proponents of the Colonial Revival wrote widely on the subject, thus popularizing it. Perhaps the most famous today was Wallace Nutting (1861-1941), photographer, publisher, writer, preacher, and

² Roth, 165.

³ Roth, 168.

⁴ Roth, 176.

⁵ Karal Ann Marling, *George Washington Slept Here: Colonial Revivals and American Culture 1876-1986*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988) 62.

⁶ Marling, 19.

advocate of old houses. Nutting believed he could save his countrymen from their own bad taste by reproducing items of antique furniture and providing examples of how to furnish one's home. His philosophy was, "Copy and avoid bad taste. Not all the old is good but all of the new is bad."⁷ Nutting's message was unmistakable. His books were filled with statements like, "Happy the hand that has held [an old house] from destruction, and kept it to flavor our day with the quaintness, the romance, the sturdiness and the love of good decoration, which must again spring up in the American character if we are to reap the benefits of our heredity and our environment."⁸ To illustrate his words, Nutting composed, colored, and marketed photographs of women in colonial costumes inhabiting period spaces filled with American antiques. One of his more recognized images entitled *The Yorktown Parlor, Webb House - Wethersfield*, actually showed three such ladies arranging flowers for the room.⁹ Nutting's images were much in demand; he "sold thousands of photographs to retailers in a variety of sizes and frames, and even on greeting cards and calendars. Such wide dissemination over a period of decades represented a major force in popularizing the Colonial Revival aesthetic for the general population."¹⁰ His pictures were also published in magazines like

⁷ Elizabeth Stillinger, *The Antiquers*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980) 190.

⁸ Wallace Nutting, *Connecticut Beautiful*, (Framingham, MA: Old America Company, 1923)78-81.

⁹ Nutting, 148.

¹⁰ Geoffrey L. Rossano, ed., *Creating a Dignified Past: Museums and the Colonial Revival*, (Savage, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1991) 107-8.

*Harper's Monthly, Women's Home Companion, Country Life in America, and the Ladies' Home Journal.*¹¹

Some architects of the early twentieth century also followed--and wrote about--the Colonial Revival. One was Joseph Everett Chandler (1864-1945) who published *The Colonial House* in 1923. Chandler, a professional concerned primarily with the architectural details of Colonial interiors, wrote, "a view, of course, is desirable, but sun seems indispensable, and some living green within walls seems equally essential, while if flowers can be added, the effect of course is still more home like."¹²

Architects, collectors, and critics also spread Colonial Revival ideas through magazines. Periodicals were a simple way to get the new aesthetic into the average American home. Publications geared just to women readers had emerged in the nineteenth century with great success. *Godey's Lady's Book* and *Peterson's Magazine* were just two of the magazines that became exceedingly popular.¹³ Women, the primary decorators of their homes by 1850, looked to these sources for the latest fashions and trends.

This continued throughout the Colonial Revival period. Magazines like *Good Housekeeping* (1885-present), *House Beautiful* (1896-

¹¹Joyce P. Barendsen, "Wallace Nutting, an American Tastemaker," *Winterthur Portfolio* XVIII, (Summer/ Autumn 1983) 187.

¹² Joseph Everett Chandler, *The Colonial House*, (New York: Robert M. McBride and Company, 1923) 43.

¹³ *Godey's Lady's Book* was published from 1830 to 1892. At its height of popularity, it was considered the most prominent woman's magazine of its time. *Peterson's Magazine* was started in 1842 to compete with Godey's. By 1862, it had the largest circulation of any ladies' magazine in the United States. It remained a strong source of new fashions well into the 1880's. This information comes from Frank Luther Mott's *A History of American Magazines* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968). *Godey's* - vol. 1, 350-51. *Peterson's* - vol. 2, 306-9.

present), and *Better Homes and Gardens* (1922-present) all circulated images of colonial interiors to their many readers.¹⁴ Flowers often graced the rooms pictured, and home decorators were encouraged to emulate and imitate the illustrations. *House and Garden* (1901-present), another very popular periodical, highlighted the work of Colonial Revival architects regularly.¹⁵ As noted in an essay in *The Colonial Revival in America*:

In its early years, the magazine concentrated on architecture and was aimed at those with interests similar to the editors' own. It summed up the genteel eclecticism of Philadelphia and in so doing gave prominence both to actual colonial buildings and to the colonial revival. Still, *House and Garden* did not champion a single architectural style but pressed more generally for high standards of design, practicality, and comfort. By avoiding out-and-out polemics but exposing the colonial widely in a context appealing to a broad range of sensitive readers, it may have done more to increase the popularity of the colonial revival than if it had been more deliberately slanted toward the style.¹⁶

The introduction of several influential clubs and organizations also corresponded to flower use during the Colonial Revival. The

¹⁴ *Good Housekeeping's* circulation was 300,000 in 1911 and grew to 2,500,000 by 1943. (Mott, vol. 5, 133-141.) *House Beautiful* had a yearly circulation of 100,000 in the 1930's and was considered a higher class magazine than *Good Housekeeping* and *Better Homes and Gardens*. (Mott, vol. 5, 154-162.) *Better Homes and Gardens* had an annual circulation of 1,000,000 by 1928, only six years after its introduction. (Mott, vol. 5, 36-8.)

¹⁵ *House and Garden* was founded by three prominent Philadelphia architects in 1901 to promote the architect's point of view. It was one of the two most important magazines serving women and their homes during this period, *House Beautiful* being the other. It was always considered a "high-grade magazine." (Mott, vol. 4, 324.)

¹⁶ Edward Teitelman and Betsy Fahlman, "Wilson Eyre and the Colonial Revival in Philadelphia," *The Colonial Revival in America*, Alan Axelrod, ed., (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1985) 84.

Daughters of the American Revolution was founded in the early 1890's. By 1896, the organization was involved with the preservation of several Revolutionary sites. A group composed of generally wealthier women, the National Society of the Colonial Dames of America was founded during this same period. They also became involved with saving and maintaining historic sites by the end of the nineteenth century.¹⁷

In 1913, the nine-year old Philadelphia Garden Club had asked eleven other garden clubs to join them, creating the Garden Club of America. Their first annual meeting was held at Stenton, James Logan's 1728 Georgian house in Germantown. Their constitution was then written at Andalusia, the historic Biddle family home.¹⁸ From its beginning, the Garden Club of America was associated with historic sites and many of its founding members were active D.A.R. and Colonial Dames members. And this involvement was surely the case with many other chapters across the nation. In an essay on the Colonial Revival in Litchfield, Connecticut, William Butler wrote: "A group of ambitious ladies formed the town's first Garden Club of America chapter, with membership limited only to those women already in the DAR. With patriotic zeal they promoted new colonial-style gardens. They idealized the past and planted 'old-fashioned,

¹⁷ William B. Rhoads, *The Colonial Revival*, (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1977) 417-8.

¹⁸ Marjorie Gibbon Battles and Catherine Colt Dickey, *Fifty Blooming Years*, (The Garden Club of America, 1963)17-19.

English flower gardens' rather than the more authentic herb and vegetable gardens."¹⁹

Garden clubs further perpetuated the ideas of "colonial" flower gardens and "colonial" arrangements through flower shows. Considered the main network for the distribution of "the knowledge and love of gardening," shows became very popular in the early 1920's.²⁰ Of course, flower shows included flower arrangement categories, and these were among the favorite events from the beginning. "Early American" and "American Williamsburg" became established categories at state and national flower shows. Although the contest rules suggested appropriate containers and materials, no period sources were included in the competitor's guidebooks. There was some variation in the definition of these categories between different garden club organizations, but judges looked for arrangements that evoked a "sturdy, functional pioneer, cheerful, and frugal" spirit in the case of "Early American" bouquets or a feeling of "stately dignity" in the case of the "American Williamsburg" arrangements.²¹ Accessories were also encouraged; if participants had antique containers or some other things to compliment their entry, this was acceptable.²²

Winning examples from these categories were often published, as was the case with the prize bouquets of the Garden Club of

¹⁹ William Butler, "Another City upon a Hill: Litchfield, Connecticut and the Colonial Revival," *The Colonial Revival in America*, Alan Axelrod, ed., (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1985) 49.

²⁰ Battles, 31.

²¹ Esther Veramae Hamel, *The Fully Revised Encyclopedia of Judging and Exhibiting Floriculture & Flora-Artistry*, 5th ed., (St. Ignatius, Montana: Ponderosa Press, 1982) 383-4.

²² Hamel, 384.

American's New York Flower Show of 1946. *The Magazine Antiques* ran several pages of photographs of the best arrangements. The "Best in Show" award was given to an arrangement purported to be a Philadelphia bouquet of the 1721-1787 period. The flowers were placed in a very elaborate alabaster urn on top of a period "lowboy." The very large arrangement was done in the "Hogarth" curve configuration with modern flowers. This effort was published as an example of colonial design.²³ Other magazines also published flower show "period" arrangements. The September, 1934, issue of *House and Garden* illustrated five categories of flower design, among them "Early American" and "Georgian."²⁴

The Colonial Revival movement was responsible for incorporating flower arrangements into the average person's idea of the colonial American interior. Flowers contributed to the rustic homey feeling created in the early twentieth century to celebrate this country's past. With an understanding of the broad reaching nature of this Colonial Revival convention, it is possible to study the introduction of flowers into historic interiors and discuss their influence on current museum installations.

²³ "Four Centuries of Furniture with Flowers," *The Magazine Antiques*, vol. 50, no. 1, (July 1946) 24-5.

²⁴ "Five Periods of Flower Arrangements," *House and Garden*, (September 1934) 43-5.

17th- and 18th-Century Sources Cited by the Colonial Revivalists

The Colonial Revival was a time of beautifying the past and evoking the atmosphere of colonial days. When the revivalists turned their attention to flowers, what types of sources served as their inspiration? What can be gleaned from these sources about actual cut-flower use, and how were these sources read by Colonial Revival practitioners?

Actual American seventeenth- and eighteenth-century sources had little to say about cut flower use in domestic settings; the revivalists had to focus on materials they could find which included contemporary prints and paintings, newspapers, estate inventories, extant containers, and English and European publications. The sheer lack of material should have been their most telling clue when attempting to recreate actual practices.

Colonists certainly had gardens. Historians had the most information about those gardens from their knowledge of books written in the 17th and 18th centuries that described new varieties of plants and flowers found in North America. The Colonial Revivalist knew that flowers were available to settlers, but they did not take the research a step further to realize that plants were thought of and used in different ways then than they are today.²⁵ Flowers were rarely ornamental in the early years of settlement; plants were grown for food or for medicinal uses. Plants with strong fragrance could mask the odors in the average home and were valued for that reason. In 1637, Thomas Morton of Merry Mount

²⁵ Joan Parry Dutton, *The Flower World of Williamsburg*, (Williamsburg, VA: The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1962) 41-58.

wrote of the luxury of having herbs and edible greens in his garden. He particularly noted that his garden included, "divers arematicall herbes and plants, as sassafras, muske roses, violets, balme, laurell, hunnisuckles and the like that with their vapours perfume the air."²⁶ No mention was made of their beauty or ornamental character.

Other European sources suggested plants and flowers were used indoors for aromatic reasons. Levinus Limnui, a Dutch physician who travelled through England in 1560, wrote of his hosts, "their chambers and parlors strawed all over with sweete herbes refreshed mee; their nosegays finally intermingled wyth sundrey sortes of fragrunte floures in their bedchambers and privyroomes with comfortable smell cheered me up and entirelye delygthed all my senses."²⁷ "Strewing" as this practice was known, was a common technique in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England, particularly at special events like weddings, parties, and funerals. In addition to concealing odor, many believed that herbes strengthened memories. No reference was made to the aesthetic value of flowers.²⁸

American settlers brought English and European traditions to the New World that included occasionally using flowers in domestic spaces, but this use was not consistent. In *Authentic Decor*, Peter Thornton described flower use in Europe during the period of 1620-1720 as follows:

²⁶ Ann Leighton, *Early American Gardens: "For Meate and Medicine"*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1970) 21.

²⁷ Kate Doggett Boggs, *Notes on Old Flower Decoration*. (American Horticultural Society, 1936) 6.

²⁸ John Brand, *Observations on the Popular Antiquities of Great Britain*, expanded edition, vol. 2, (New York: AMS Press, 1970) 116-119.

Porcelain objects were not only used in massed arrays; for example one might place a vase or jar of porcelain or faience (delftware) on the hearth to hide the empty fireplace when the fire was not lit, perhaps with an arrangement of flowers in the vase. Garnitures (i.e. sets of three, five or even seven vessels *en suite*) were placed on mantelshelves and over door-cases. *Jardinieres* with flowers (cut or growing) were placed on the floor, and small ones were sometimes stood on ledges formed by projecting cornices... Artificial flowers of silk, paper, straw or even glass were to be seen, especially in those parts of Europe where flowers could not be brought to bloom all the year round. Vases of real flowers, never arranged very carefully, it seems, were also placed about the house, but not as an obligatory piece of decoration. It is as if the vase of flowers was a casual, informal after-thought.²⁹

Period sources, or lack of them, seem to confirm Thornton's ideas.³⁰ Especially in Holland, a country known for its flowers, the absence of seventeenth-century paintings of interiors that show flowers must be acknowledged.³¹ Apparently, the porcelain and earthenware

²⁹ Peter Thornton, *Authentic Decor: The Domestic Interior 1620-1920*, (New York: Viking, 1984) 60.

³⁰ A count of the illustrations in Peter Thornton's *Authentic Decor* was completed. Out of 49 seventeenth-century European interiors illustrated, ten (20%) showed flower use. Of the three English seventeenth-century interiors reproduced, zero showed flower use. Thornton illustrated 57 eighteenth-century European interiors and only nine of these (16%) showed flower use. Of the ten English eighteenth-century interiors shown, again zero displayed flowers. By the nineteenth century, the statistics change dramatically. Sixty percent (18 out of 30) of the English and Fifty-seven percent of the European (77 out of 135) show flower and plant use in the interiors.

³¹ *Authentic Decor* illustrated twenty seventeenth-century Dutch interiors. Three show flower use. However, in all three, the uses appear to be more than purely ornamental. Plate 20 on page 29 shows the flowers on food. Plate 29 on page 34 shows a small vase on the floor of a room at the feet of several men. It seems to be there for fragrance. Finally, plate 39 on page 36 shows a basket above a door jamb. Again fragrance could be a concern in this illustration.

pieces listed in early inventories were intended to be displayed without cut-flowers in the vessels.³² This assertion is supported by a letter from Josiah Wedgwood to his partner, Thomas Bentley, in 1772. Wedgwood wrote:

Vases are furniture for a chimney piece- Bough pots for a hearth, under a Slab of Marble Table; I think they never can be used one instead of the other, & I apprehend one reason why we have not made our dressing flowerpots to please has been by adapting them for chimney pieces where I think they do not [place] any pots dress'd with flowers. If I am wrong in this idea I should be glad to be set right as it is of consequence in forming these articles to know where to place them.³³

Eighteenth-century American paintings and prints rarely show flower arrangements.³⁴ Colonial Revivalists turned to the few known sources and supplemented them with European images. Often the European paintings consulted were still lifes or Flemish fruit and flower paintings. All of these, of course, were very susceptible to the artistic license of their creators. Take, for example, the portrait of Elizabeth Paddy Wensley (unknown artist, c. 1665), a Massachusetts pilgrim. Behind the sitter is a glass vase filled with cut flowers

³² Danielle O. Kisluk-Grosheide, "Tulips in Dutch Seventeenth-century Decorative Arts," *The Magazine Antiques*, (April 1991) 746.

³³ Jane Bentley Kolter, "Wedgwood's Plant and Flower Holders," *The Magazine Antiques*, (June 1984) 1351.

³⁴ In *Authentic Decor*, Peter Thornton illustrates no seventeenth-century American interiors and only three eighteenth-century American interiors. There are no flowers in any of these pictures. In *At Home: The American Family 1750-1870* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1990), Elisabeth Garrett shows twenty eighteenth-century American interiors, all without flowers. Again, the nineteenth century shows a marked change. Fifty-four percent (13 out of 24) of Thornton's American images and thirty-two percent (34 out of 106) of Garrett interiors show flower or plant use.

including roses, tulips, and pinks. Were the flowers actually there when the picture was being painted? Were the flowers a symbol of femininity? Were they an American convention possibly suggesting taste or wealth? Or, were they a British or European convention transported to America? Were they part of a standard background already painted before the sitting? Scholars studying specific floral motifs have suggested that the few large arrangements composed of a variety of flowers that appear in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century paintings, display flowers "in sumptuous but unrealistic arrangements beside flowers that bloomed in other seasons."³⁵ It seems the paintings came together only "in the imagination of the painters."³⁶

Perhaps some of the arrangements pictured were composed of artificial flowers. For the wealthy person who could afford to commission a portrait, artificial flowers made of silk, paper, feathers, wax, glass, or straw were also a luxury within means.³⁷ During a period when artifice was valued, the use of natural elements may have been devalued. Artificial flowers were preferred by those who could afford them. A French illustration from Joseph Gilliers' "Le Cannamaliste francais" of 1768 depicts a very lavish and fashionable table. Pierced baskets of artificial flowers are shown flanking three spun sugar fountains.³⁸ An inventory from the Governor's Palace in

³⁵ Kisluk-Grosheide, 742.

³⁶ John Forti, Horticulturist and Herbalist, Plimouth Plantation, Plymouth, MA, Letter to author, (September 9, 1991).

³⁷ Peter Thornton, *Seventeenth-Century Interior Decoration in England, France, and Holland*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970) 267.

³⁸ Louise Conway Belden, *The Festive Tradition: Table Decoration and Desserts in America, 1650-1900*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1983) 73.

Williamsburg, Virginia, dated 1768-1770 offers proof that artificial flowers were also used in American interiors. "6 Artificial flowers" are listed in the Cook's bed chamber; it is the only reference to flowers, artificial or natural, on the inventory.³⁹ In *The Festive Tradition*, Louise Conway Belden discussed fresh flower use in the first half of the eighteenth century. She wrote, "Occasionally a hostess used fresh flowers if she had no artificial ones, although real flowers for the table, particularly in the early years of the rococo century, were considered countrified."⁴⁰

Eighteenth-century newspaper advertisements supplement our knowledge of the period, identifying vases and other vessels imported to hold cut-flowers and flowering plants. Notices indicate that many types of containers for flowers were available during the second-half of the 18th century in large cities. For example, the following notice appeared in the July 20, 1763, edition of the *South Carolina Gazette*:

CROFT & DART

Have just imported, in the Joseph, Capt. Seager, from Bristol and will sell cheap... ..shallow and soup white stone mosaic plates and dishes - fruit baskets - green mellons and leaves - neat stone faces and **horns for flowers** - blue and white water jugs....⁴¹

³⁹ *The Restoration of Colonial Williamsburg in Virginia*, Reprinted from the *Architectural Record* issue of December 1935, (New York: F. W. Dodge Corp., 1935) 449.

⁴⁰ Belden, 79.

⁴¹ *South Carolina Gazette*, Charleston, SC, 20 August 1763, 3-2. From the collection of the Museum of Southern Decorative Arts' Research Library, Winston-Salem, NC. Emphasis mine.

A second notice from the same paper dated January 21, 1766, proclaimed:

SAMUEL WISE,
Has just imported in the Baltick Merchant, Capt. Clarkson,
from BRISTOL,
... delph, white stone plates, dishes, bowls and tureens,
pine apple, collyflower and tortoise shell tea pots, coffee
pots, milk pots, sugar dishes, **flower horns**, and pickle
leaves, **flower pots**, milk pans, crates of earthen ware,
stone jugs, four gallon glass bottles wicherd, crown
window glass of all sizes, iron pots of all sizes....⁴²

Notices like these appeared in the papers of most American cities, but rarely specify more than flower horns or flower pots.⁴³

"Flower horns" were cornucopia-shaped ceramic pieces for mounting on walls or mantelshelves. If accompanied with stands, they could also be freestanding pieces. The meaning of the term "flower pot" is less clear. It may have been a specific term for a vessel that held potted plants (very much like the meaning of the phrase today), or it could have been a general term for any container holding flowers. In either case, vessels might have been further differentiated by what type of cut-flowers, potted plant, or flowering bulb they were intended to hold.⁴⁴ The distinction between forms like hyacinth holders and bough pots might have been as subtle for the average person or even for the average inventory taker, as it was

⁴² *South-Carolina Gazette; and Country Journal*, Charleston, SC, 21 January 1766, 1-1. From the collection of the Museum of Southern Decorative Arts' Research Library, Winston-Salem, NC. Emphasis mine.

⁴³ Belden, 79-81. Boston and New York are named specifically.

⁴⁴ Charles Thomforde, "Appendix J: Indoor Flowers and their Containers," *Pennsbury Manor Furnishing Plan*, Clare Lise Cavicchi, ed., (Morrisville, PA: Pennsbury Society, 1988) 187.

for Josiah Wedgwood and his partner. For example, on December 31, 1767, Wedgwood wrote Bentley after attending a holiday dinner at his soon-to-be partner's home:

Your *punch bowl* is a *Winter* [root] *flowerpot*, not to be fill'd with water & *branches* of flowers, but with *sand*, & *bulbous roots* & is to those baubles made in Glass for growing one bulbous root, what a *Garden* is to a *flowerpot*, however I must acknowledge that seeing you did not find out the original intention of the vessel, you have hit upon a tolerable succedameum... my best thanks for the honour you have done the maker in remembering him at your festive board.⁴⁵

It is not surprising that the majority of references to containers in estate inventories are simply denoted as "flower pots" or with some similar general term.⁴⁶ Without the proper nomenclature, it is impossible to know whether the room contained a flower root glass, or an ornamental painted flower pan or a common vase for cut flowers. It cannot be assumed that "flower pot" meant cut flower holder; it could just as easily been a container for growing a small plant.⁴⁷

It should also be noted that the presence of other ceramic, silver, and glass objects in inventories is not a licence to use those objects to hold flowers or plants. For example, a Monteith is a bowl with notches around the rim to hold wine glasses being rinsed between courses. At Colonial Williamsburg these vessels were until recently

⁴⁵ Kolter, 1351.

⁴⁶ See Appendix Three for a sample of Philadelphia, PA estate inventories with references to flower use.

⁴⁷ General glassware inventories, from the collection of the Museum of Southern Decorative Arts' Research Library, Winston-Salem, NC.

used for a very different purpose--to hold floral bouquets.⁴⁸

Monteiths and many other domestic forms of the seventeenth and eighteenth were never meant for flowers.

Finally, the Colonial Revivalists used eighteenth-century diaries and travel journals that sometimes described flower use in American interiors. References seemed to be more common in coastal cities where colonists were more aware of English and European fashion. Life was easier in these locations and thus, there was a larger percentage of wealthy households. When English publications began to describe how to dry flowers for year-round use in the eighteenth-century, European visitors began to remark on the adoption of these practices in American cities. Peter Kalm, a Swede traveling in the New World during the mid-eighteenth century, noted on September 29, 1748, "*English ladies were used to gather great quantities of this Life everlasting and to pluck them with the stalks. For they put them into pots with or without water, amongst other fine flowers which they had gathered both in the gardens and in the fields, and placed in or upon the chimneys, sometimes upon a table, or before the windows, either on account of their fine appearance, or for the sake of their sweet smell.*"⁴⁹ John Collison, an Englishman and plant enthusiast who traded varieties with several of his countrymen in

⁴⁸ Louise B. Fisher, *An Eighteenth-Century Garland: The Flower and Fruit Arrangements of Colonial Williamsburg*, (Williamsburg, VA: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1951) 6.

⁴⁹ Information about drying plant materials appeared in Philip Miller's *The Gardener's Dictionary* which was published in London in nine editions between 1731 and 1739. The quote comes from Peter Kalm, *Travels through North America*, vol. 1, (Warrington: William Eyres, 1770)130-31.

America, discussed floral use with correspondent John Custis of Williamsburg, Virginia. Collison wrote:

I am much Delighted to heare you have your amaranthoides. It is a Real & I may say perpetual Beauty. If the flowers are gather'd in perfection and hung up with their Heads Downwards in a Dry shady Room, they will keep thear Colours for years and will make a pleasant Ornament to Adorn the Windows of your parlor and study all the Winter. I Dry great quantities for that purpose and putt them in flower potts & China basons and they make a fine show all the Winter.⁵⁰

Both these references are really about dried flowers, blossoms that once prepared would last indefinitely with little care. Fresh cut-flowers demanded more attention, and it is more difficult to find diary entries that discuss their use. As one decorative arts historian has recently written:

Unfortunately, although many eighteenth-century diarists tell us that they gathered bouquets, they rarely tell us where they put them; but cut flowers were usually arranged in small, compact bouquets on the mantel. Joshua Brookes admired the 'marble jars and blue china one in which were placed some blue and red bachelors buttons' on the drawing-room mantel at Mount Vernon in February 1799. Charlestonians seem to have been very fond of flowers. In 1761 John Rattray owned several flowerpots and five flower horns - cornucopia- shaped flower pockets with flat backs that hung against the wall - and three years later one might have selected a flower container from Mrs. Ann Air, whose shop goods included five

⁵⁰ Dutton, 66.

flower horns and '43pr. painted glass flower potts.'⁵¹

Another type of publication that was cited as a source for flower arrangements, was the design pattern book. Pattern books of the period were a great source of design inspiration to the craftsmen of their day. It was assumed that cut flowers were displayed in English drawing rooms with the latest designs of Hepplewhite and Sheraton.⁵² Sheraton even illustrated several tiny nosegay's with his designs in *The Cabinet-Maker and Upholsterer's Drawing-Book* of 1793.⁵³ Of course, these pattern books were technically post-colonial sources, and demonstrated a style more associated with the early nineteenth century. Thomas Chippendale's *The Gentleman & Cabinet-Maker's Director* (1754), the most popular source of its kind during the mid-eighteenth century, illustrated no flowers or plants.⁵⁴

What all these sources seem to suggest is that cut-flower arrangements in Colonial America were either nonexistent or very casual. There is no evidence of any system or set of rules for arranging blossoms and sprigs of herbes. Joan Dutton, in *The Flower World of Williamsburg*, has argued that "all the evidence indicates that the average eighteenth-century housewife wanted to show off her flowers rather than display her skill in arranging them. At a time when interest in plant exploration and botany ran high, people would surely have on occasion been proud of a single bloom and

⁵¹ Garrett, 73.

⁵² Julia S. Berrall, *A History of Flower Arrangement*, (New York: The Studio Publications, Inc., 1953) 77.

⁵³ Thomas Sheraton, *The Cabinet-Maker and Upholsterer's Drawing-Book*, (1793; New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1972) plate XIV, XVI, and XXX.

⁵⁴ Thomas Chippendale, *The Gentleman & Cabinet-Maker's Director*, 3rd ed., (1762; New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1966).

would have brought it indoors to display it."⁵⁵ This is just the type of thing pictured in John Singleton Copley's portrait of Mrs. George Watson (1765). Her hand grasps the base of a blue and white china vase that contains a single parrot tulip and two small checkered lilies.⁵⁶ These are the type of unusual flowers that would have been grown from imported bulbs and would have been valued for their variety, as well as, their individual beauty.

Louise Fisher at Colonial Williamsburg

To further illustrate the influence Colonial Revivalists' use of flowers had on other historic interiors, two studies of "cultural hearths" of Colonial Revival ideas are offered.

Colonial Williamsburg--as the name implies--is a crucial case-study to examine. The project, began in 1927 at the suggestion of Dr. W. A. R. Goodwin, rector of the Bruton Parish in Williamsburg, to Mr. John D. Rockefeller, eventually opened the eyes of many average Americans to their "Colonial Past." By its completion in 1935, 440 post-colonial structures had been destroyed, 18 other post-colonial structures had been relocated, 66 colonial buildings had been restored, and 84 other buildings and numerous gardens had been reproduced.⁵⁷ The landscape and garden elements of restored

⁵⁵ Dutton, 76-77.

⁵⁶ Berrall, 86.

⁵⁷ *The Restoration of Colonial Williamsburg in Virginia*, 357. For a more in depth look at the founding of Colonial Williamsburg see Elizabeth Stiller, *The Antiquers*, 272-279.

Williamsburg were direct products of Colonial Revival trends in the 1920's and 30's. Charles B. Hosmer, Jr. wrote:

Their [landscape architects and historians] training did not equip them for the development of accurate historical museum exhibit areas. Administrators of historical restorations believed that visitors should see an essentially beautiful picture of the past, and this outlook inhibited efforts to produce historically accurate garden settings. The landscape decisions made at Williamsburg were repeated at private and public restorations all over the United States in the 1930's.⁵⁸

This same pattern also applied to the use of flowers in the colonial interiors at Williamsburg, where authenticity was sacrificed for aesthetics. As Joan Dutton wrote in *The Flower World of Williamsburg*, "Year in and year out, Colonial Williamsburg's old-time bouquets are probably seen by more people than any other flower arrangements in America."⁵⁹ The example set by such a publicized and seemingly authentic restoration was a logical one for smaller museums to emulate.

And no one was more responsible for creating the floral image of the past than Louise Bang Fisher, who moved to Williamsburg in 1930 when husband, John Fisher, was appointed the head of the Modern Languages Department at the College of William and Mary. Louise Fisher was an avid gardener, and it was said that when she moved, she brought one truckload of furniture and household

⁵⁸ Charles B. Hosmer, Jr., "The Colonial Revival in the Public Eye: Williamsburg and Early Garden Restoration," *The Colonial Revival in America*, Alan Axelrod, ed., (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1985) 52.

⁵⁹ Dutton, 75.

belongings and two truckloads of "blooming plants" to their new home.⁶⁰

Mrs. Fisher's interest in the restoration grew and in 1933, soon after Colonial Williamsburg opened several of its buildings to the public, Fisher became a hostess at the Raleigh Tavern. That Spring she began bringing flowers from her own garden to the tavern in order to create a "natural, lived-in appearance."⁶¹ Of course, these were modern flowers in modern containers, and learned guests were quick to question what dahlias and grapefruits--unknown to colonial Americans--were doing in supposedly 18th-century arrangements. Fisher turned to the research department for verification of authenticity, but the historians were too over-worked to consider the question. They told Fisher she was welcome to find out for herself. In the meantime, the average tourist praised the flower arrangements in the Raleigh Tavern, and Colonial Williamsburg asked Fisher to do other bouquets for the Governor's Palace, the Wythe House and the Brush-Everard House. Cutting gardens were planted, and Mrs. Fisher started her research at the Library of Congress. She returned to the historians of Williamsburg with several documented uses of cut flowers in period interiors. By 1936, Colonial Williamsburg had established a flower department with extensive cutting gardens, wild flowers, and woodland; Louise Fisher was at the helm.⁶² She described the situation:

⁶⁰ Parke Rouse, Jr., "Williamsburg's Way with Flower Arrangements," *Colonial Williamsburg*, (Spring 1988) 19.

⁶¹ Rouse, 19.

⁶² Dutton, 59.

The busy Research Department was only too glad to hand over the problem of authenticity to me, and gradually not only the responsibility for the arrangements, but also the question of which flowers could properly be included in them, became mine. What had started as a hobby was soon a full-time job.⁶³

Louise Fisher remained head of the Flower Department until 1956 when she retired. During those years she introduced not only cut flowers, but dried flower arrangements and Christmas decorations, developing a facet of the Colonial Williamsburg experience that still lingers. She also influenced decorators across the country by writing articles and books, demonstrating techniques on film, and lecturing to various groups and organizations. If there was ever was a desire to beautify and accessorize the historic past, Louise Fisher took hold of it and made it a common and accepted practice in the interpretation of 17th- and 18th-century period interiors.

Were Mrs. Fisher's findings and practices completely inaccurate? The answer is no. However, she unwittingly did misinterpret and misrepresent some of her findings. It is important to comprehend what these misunderstandings were and how they were passed on as proper interpretation to other sites.

Fisher's first step was to develop a vocabulary of flowers. She consulted John Parkinson's *Paradisi In Sole Paridius* (London:1656) and Philip Miller's *Gardener's Dictionary* (London: 1737) to develop plant lists. These were both English sources. Of course, many of the flowers were not available in their original varieties and modern equivalents were substituted in Williamsburg's gardens. With 200

⁶³ Fisher, *An Eighteenth Century Garland*, 3.

types of flowers and blooming shrubs available from the cutting gardens alone, it was possible to cut and arrange huge quantities of fresh flowers every day from late March to October.⁶⁴ A film, *The Flower Arrangements of Williamsburg*, made in 1953 about the flower department at Williamsburg shows the blossoms being gathered at 6 a.m. every morning.⁶⁵ The cut flowers were then transferred to a storeroom where they were conditioned for at least a day at 40 F.⁶⁶ It seems doubtful that any colonist had the time, land, variety of flowers, or climate controlled facility one would need to resemble, even remotely, the commonplace operations of Mrs. Fisher's gardens.

Fisher's next step was to choose a container for the arrangement. Research and the collection at Colonial Williamsburg yielded many vases and holders designed specifically for cut flowers. Fisher was fortunate to have several original pieces to work with and reproductions of others. However, even when using period flower containers, it was possible to create a modern product. Fisher, by her own admission, loved to use as many flowers as possible. She delighted in the flowers themselves and believed that her way was the way "people really like best to see flowers arranged."⁶⁷ This policy, however, sometimes interfered with the original way blooms were displayed in the container. Five, seven, and nine-fingered vases were probably intended to hold only one or two stems in each

⁶⁴ Dutton, 59.

⁶⁵ *Flower Arrangements of Williamsburg*, directed by Ross Patton, (Williamsburg, VA: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Inc., 1953) film.

⁶⁶ Rouse, 22.

⁶⁷ Fisher, *An Eighteenth-Century Garland*, 11.

opening. Mrs. Fisher crammed as much foliage and as many flowers stems as possible into the period piece, treating it like any other vase in her arsenal. She wrote, "A nine-fingered holder, by its peculiar shade of blue and its ducks'-head handles, shows the Chinese influence in eighteenth-century containers. It is not easy to arrange flowers in this holder but the results can be most rewarding."⁶⁸ Perhaps flowers were never meant to be "arranged" in this type of container.

A second area worth questioning concerns the use of containers that were never intended to hold flowers. Porcelain punch bowls, pewter tankards and teapots, tureens, cups and goblets were all used regularly to evoke an 18th-century "feel." Fisher knew the function of many of these pieces, but insisted they were acceptable alternatives. She wrote: "I would include among the most useful and satisfactory containers in the collection an old Worchester soup tureen; flowers rarely fail to look particularly happy in almost all tureens."⁶⁹

The next step was to choose the flowers for the arrangement considering the container and the final placement of the piece. Fisher believed that the choice of flowers depended most on the color of the room for which the arrangement was intended; light-colored flowers were better for dark colored rooms and richly colored flowers added more life to pale woodwork and wall hangings.⁷⁰ She also sought complimentary textures. The 1953 film mentioned

⁶⁸ Fisher, *An Eighteenth-Century Garland*, 6.

⁶⁹ Fisher, *An Eighteenth-Century Garland*, 6.

⁷⁰ Fisher, *An Eighteenth-Century Garland*, 11.

earlier showed Louise Fisher making a huge arrangement of sun flowers, day lilies, butterfly weed and cranberry bush branches to pick up sun details found on the andirons in a room. The intended location of the arrangement also determined its size and shape. If a piece were to be put against the wall, it would only be arranged on three sides. Larger rooms got larger arrangements. The exact location of an arrangement depended more upon visitor traffic patterns and the presence of any heating registers or drafts than upon absolute historical necessity.

Fisher's research had uncovered several period prints and pictures from which she developed the actual style of arranging flowers. Early horticultural books, seed catalogues, and garden journals were useful in determining which ornamentals were actually cut and brought indoors, but they did not illustrate what the arrangements looked like. For this, the few prints and pictures became the most heavily relied upon sources.⁷¹ Colonial Williamsburg had a set of Robert Furber's *Twelve Months of Flowers* (London: 1730). These were twelve hand colored prints, one of each month, showing the flowers of that particular month. The engravings were based on flower images by the Flemish artist Pieter Casteels.⁷² Each of Furber's prints showed a large urn-like vase stuffed with a variety of individual blossoms. Mrs. Fisher had found the precedent for her bouquets. She learned to arrange in this fashion and taught her assistants the same. Fisher wrote of the Furber prints, "Most of these prints show many flowers, in massed arrangements which are

⁷¹ Rouse, 21.

⁷² Dutton, 14-17.

suitable for the large rooms of the eighteenth century. While it is hardly possible to make exact copies of the old prints, with sufficient study and practice one can make massed arrangements look quite 'printy'."⁷³

The Furber prints were Louise Fisher's greatest misrepresentation. These prints were intended as a catalogue of sorts. Instead of illustrating every seed and bulb available, Furber chose to put one blossom from each variety available into a common image. His intention was to describe a flower's usefulness for the "curious in gardening." Another audience for the prints was painters, carvers, and japaners who used them as guides when working on floral shapes and images. Finally, Furber intended his prints to serve as models and inspiration for those learning the art of watercolors. Nowhere did he say that his bouquets were anything but fantastic compilations of seasonal blooms.⁷⁴ They were not images of period flower arrangements. This simple misunderstanding of purpose was one of the most important reasons why arrangements at Colonial Williamsburg looked the way they did. Fisher's bouquets were published and written about in various magazines and books, and the type of arrangement was always said to have been "in the eighteenth-century manner." The variety of flowers in a bouquet, the sheer amount of plant material used, and the density of its placement were all explicable when Furber's images were thought to be common arrangements.

⁷³ Louise B. Fisher, "Old Time Flowers and How They Grew," *The Magazine Antiques*, (March 1941) 122.

⁷⁴ Dutton, 14-17.

Taking the misunderstanding a step further, the historians at Colonial Williamsburg assumed that every 18th-century house had a garden of its own.⁷⁵ Even if that had been true, there was no evidence that ornamentals were a part of all of those gardens. More likely useful plants, including vegetables and herbs, were a priority, and flowers, when grown, would have stayed blooming in the garden. Flowers were a luxury and probably much more common in wealthy landowners' yards. As Ann Leighton has suggested, "The last thing [the early colonists] needed, ...as they set themselves to be examples to all, was gardens requiring meticulous grooming and yielding nothing to be readily harvested 'for meate and medicine'."⁷⁶

Colonial Williamsburg continued using flower arrangements as Fisher had conceived of them for years. A recent statement about the Flower Department's work reminds, "Although thoroughly qualified persons have continued Mrs. Fisher's work, the world of flowers has not changed nor have the fundamental elements of Williamsburg designs."⁷⁷ Ten years ago, policies began to shift as Colonial Williamsburg began to re-evaluate its interior interpretation.

Expanding research since 1928 has led Colonial Williamsburg to alter its building interpretation over the years. This has resulted in fewer and simpler flowers in some buildings, Libbey Oliver points out. All arrangements have been removed, as unauthentic, from the taverns. And since the reinterpretation of the Governor's Palace furnishings in 1981, now furnished to the 1770 inventory of

⁷⁵ Film, 1953.

⁷⁶ Leighton, 162.

⁷⁷ Film, Although the film was made in 1953, this quote comes from a disclaimer added at the beginning of the film at a more recent date.

bachelor governor Lord Botetourt, Palace bouquets have been cut in number and complexity."⁷⁸

However, this change comes too late to undo the influence of Louise Fisher and her associates on smaller museums and historic sites across the country.

Winterthur's Use of Flowers

A second institution that demands consideration is the Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum and Gardens in Winterthur, Delaware, the most important collection of American Decorative Arts in the world. Winterthur was the product of Henry Francis du Pont (1880-1969), who began to accumulate American objects in 1918. At first his primary focus was furniture, although he was also interested in architectural woodwork. The collection expanded rapidly and du Pont began to consider better ways to display the artifacts. He wrote:

I came in contact with widely divergent early American materials of all kinds. The problem of giving them appropriate recognition inevitably came to my mind. After the opening the American Wing at the Metropolitan Museum in New York in 1924, and another such wing in the Brooklyn Museum...it occurred to me to undertake a similar venture, and I decided to add an "American Wing" to Winterthur, which I had inherited at about this time.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Rouse, 23.

⁷⁹ Stillinger, 223.

Du Pont began to acquire woodwork, collecting whole rooms from houses throughout the original colonies. They ranged in date from 1640 to 1840 and geographically from New England to South Carolina. These rooms were installed in du Pont's house, replacing bathrooms, living spaces, and recreational areas including the indoor squash and tennis courts.⁸⁰ He furnished the rooms in meticulous detail. Furniture, fabrics, floor coverings and architectural elements were combined to create a total effect. Finally, he added the precious accessories that made the rooms seem more lived in. A 1951 essay about the interiors noted that "besides major furnishings, the little things that make a house a home in any period are all there - the unimportant objects that become obsolete from one generation to the next and are usually lost and forgotten."⁸¹

As du Pont's collection grew, he began to give greater consideration to issues of authenticity when furnishing his interiors. Elizabeth Stilling, author of *The Antiquers*, explained:

As he became engrossed in collecting and in creating period rooms, Du Pont concentrated increasingly on historical accuracy. Although later scholarship has sometimes contradicted him, he was trying to do things in the eighteenth-century fashion with the documentation available. He wrote in November of 1930: 'I am doing the house archaeologically and correctly, and I am paying the greatest attention even

⁸⁰ John A. H. Sweeney, *The Treasure House of Early American Rooms*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1963) 9-12.

⁸¹ This reference comes from an issue of *The Magazine Antiques* (November 1951) dedicated to the opening of the Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum. The issue was prepared by Joseph Downs, curator of the museum, and by Alice Winchester, editor of the magazine. The reference comes from page 405.

to the epoch of the fringes.'⁸²

Attention is an understatement. Henry Francis du Pont collected nearly 89,000 objects for the house.⁸³

Du Pont lived in the rooms he created until 1951 when the house was opened as a museum and he moved to another building on the grounds. While inhabiting the house, he had put some special demands on the spaces. His special philosophy of decoration insisted that all items in a room should sympathetically co-exist; no one item should stand out more than another. Architecture, decorative arts, and flowers should compliment each other. This was the du Pont aesthetic.⁸⁴ Flowers were one of Mr. du Pont's greatest loves, and he insisted on fresh cut flowers daily in the rooms. He was an avid horticulturalist, serving on the boards of four major horticultural organizations.⁸⁵ He laid out all the plantings in the gardens at Winterthur, giving special attention to the Spring flowers and bulbs, flowering trees, and shrubs.⁸⁶ Many say he loved the flower gardens more than his antiques, and he was known to pick the flowers for the bouquets himself.⁸⁷

In 1935 and again in 1938, du Pont hired New York photographer, Robert Brost, to photograph his home. Summer and Winter views were distinguished by slipcovers, different weight curtains, floor

⁸² Stillinger, 224.

⁸³ "American Interiors" tour, Winterthur Museum and Gardens, Winterthur, DE. (January 1992).

⁸⁴ Violet Riegel, Supervisor of Flower Department, Winterthur Museum and Gardens, interview with author, (February 19, 1992).

⁸⁵ *The Magazine Antiques*, (November 1951) 405.

⁸⁶ *The Magazine Antiques*, (November 1951) 405.

⁸⁷ Violet Riegel interview.

covering changes, and certainly by the flowers. Every room photographed was perfumed by as many vases and bowls of blooms as could fit on the table tops. In the majority of the images, each vase or bowl contained only one color and type of flower, although the containers were stuffed with blooms.⁸⁸ Every vase, however, held something different from the others. These monochromatic bouquets were du Pont's own idea. He demanded the blossoms be fresh and colorful. They were grown in the Winterthur conservatory or cutting gardens and changed daily. The staff were required to learn about flowers to keep up with his passion. Antique containers were used, although they were protected with custom-made modern metal liners. The bouquets were never meant to be period arrangements. There was no attempt to use historically accurate plants; there was no attempt to document interior flower use in the 17th and 18th centuries. The bouquets were simply an element that du Pont enjoyed immensely and therefore incorporated into his rooms.⁸⁹

When Winterthur became a museum the du Pont tradition of including flowers in the rooms was continued. However, as staff and trends changed, personal taste entered into the picture, and du Pont's ideas were adhered to with less and less commitment. Great emphasis was still placed on having the flowers in the interiors, but different flowers and colors were mixed and bouquets became more formally arranged. Until 1990, there were up to eight full-time staff

⁸⁸ Stereocards of Winterthur period rooms, Winterthur archives, (Winterthur, DE: 1935 and 1938).

⁸⁹ Violet Riegel interview.

members devoted to this task. Huge lavish arrangements were displayed throughout the museum--especially in the Spring.

In recent years, cost constraints have forced the dismissal of all but one of the flower arrangers, and the program was completely shut down for the past year while it was reevaluated. Although the flowers will not be grown at the museum, du Pont style of monochromatic bouquets will again grace those few rooms at Winterthur chosen to represent the years of Mr. du Pont's collecting. However, where once ten vases graced a single room, today fourteen bouquets will be made each week and distributed among only seventeen rooms especially associated with Henry Francis du Pont. Reproduction containers are now used exclusively for conservation reasons.⁹⁰

Today, the guides at Winterthur are quick to point out that du Pont's rooms are merely settings for the display of American artifacts, and that he misunderstood or chose to ignore historic furnishing arrangements and the way objects in period interiors really functioned. The decision to leave some of the rooms as du Pont originally decorated them was done so they may, "be valued for reflecting du Pont's sensitive and passionate appreciation of the beauty of American antiques. His legacy to the nation was to communicate that appreciation, proving on a major scale that the best American pieces *are* beautiful, and--through his own artistry--that they can be combined in rooms as charming and elegant as any in the world."⁹¹

⁹⁰ Violet Riegel interview.

⁹¹ Stillinger, 232.

However, for many years images of Winterthur were published in magazines and books that sang the institution's praises. Visitors saw the flowers with little explanation of their presence. The November, 1951, issue of *The Magazine Antiques* was devoted to Winterthur's opening as a museum, explaining that, "To collectors, even to museums, it has been an example and an inspiration. While no one else has attempted anything like its magnitude, many have sought to emulate its perfection."⁹² Without intending to do so, du Pont's example also induced others to use flowers in historic interiors.

Influence on Other Sites and Individual House Museums

Although it is nearly impossible to trace the origins of every decision to use flower arrangements in historic interiors, this author believes that many of these choices were rooted in the Colonial Revival and the show places of its ideals. Colonial Williamsburg and Winterthur were enormously influential, not only on the public, but in the museum world. If directors and curators of historic sites were not able to visit these places, they were able to experience them through magazines and numerous publications by which these "cultural hearths" of the Colonial Revival spread the message to the far corners of America. For example, even the American Wing at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York developed a tradition of using flowers in its period interiors. Although no bouquets appeared initially in the period rooms, they were introduced at some time

⁹² *The Magazine Antiques*, (November 1951), 406.

during the mid-twentieth century.⁹³ Recent visits and publications confirm flower use has become a convention in many of the interiors.⁹⁴

It seems obvious that examples set by large, well-respected restorations and museums would serve as models for other smaller sites without regard for proper research and documentation. Just as in the case with those creating gardens for museum restorations during the Colonial Revival, flower arrangers "helped to perpetuate the idea that the life of the past was always blissfully harmonious. There was a conscious refusal to accept the conclusions of research reports that implied colonial gardens had been simple, functional, and even somewhat bare."⁹⁵ Some, like Louise Fisher at Colonial Williamsburg, unknowingly misinterpreted their research, thus perpetuating inappropriate flower use. Once a full flower program was in place, it was hard for the institution to admit the problem and change the process.⁹⁶ This situation is not unique to Williamsburg. In a recent letter to the author, Susan M. Olson, Assistant Curator of Monticello wrote, "Three or four arrangements of fresh cut flowers are displayed in the house from April through October and dried

⁹³ Flowers do not appear in either R. T. H. Halsey and Charles O. Cornelius, *A Handbook of the American Wing*, Seventh edition, (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1942), or R. T. H. Halsey and Elizabeth Tower, *The Homes of Our Ancestors as Shown in the American Wing of the Metropolitan Museum of Art of New York from the Beginning of New England Through the Early Days of the Republic*, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran and Company, Inc., 1934).

⁹⁴ Flowers graced the interiors throughout 1991 and are apparent in the photographs of the period rooms in Marshall B. Davidson's and Elizabeth Stillinger's *The American Wing at the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, (New York: Harrison House, 1985).

⁹⁵ Hosmer, 53.

⁹⁶ Betsy Myers, Former assistant to Louise Fisher at Colonial Williamsburg, Interview with author, October, 1991.

flower arrangements are used in the winter. Unfortunately, this is a tradition that began with the 'Colonial Revival' era of fifty years ago and we have no Jefferson-period documentation to support the practice." She added that flower use is a "tradition that people are reluctant to give up entirely."⁹⁷

Flower arrangements now appear in some of the most unlikely settings. Take, for example, the House of Daniel Boone (1743-1820) in Defiance, Missouri. This Georgian-style house built in the "uncharted" Missouri Territory in 1803, is now interpreted to the time of Boone's tenure there. Photographs of Boone's bedroom and the drawing room show elaborate bouquets--unexpected ornaments for a man who is best known as "an explorer, a restless wanderer who journeyed on foot, by horseback, and by canoe into the American wilderness."⁹⁸

Maintenance guides for museums offer further proof of the prevalence of cut flower use in historic interiors. Discussions of water and insect damage to wood furniture caused by flower arrangements and deteriorating plant material's possible damage to silver and other precious metals are addressed in books such as Lee Parr McGrath's *Housekeeping with Antiques*. McGrath argues for precautions like tile trivets under vases and glass liners in antique containers.⁹⁹ If museums were not using cut flowers, there would be no need for mentioning these problems.

⁹⁷ Susan M. Olson, Assistant Curator, Monticello, Charlottesville, VA., Letter to author, August 29, 1991.

⁹⁸ James Tackach, *Historic Homes of America*, (New York: Portland House, 1990) 152-5.

⁹⁹ Lee Parr McGrath, *Housekeeping with Antiques*, (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1971) 37, 42.

The influence from sites like Colonial Williamsburg and Winterthur was immeasurable. The idea that these institutions were creating accurate interiors was accepted without question, and flowers became as accepted in recreated seventeenth- and eighteenth-century interiors as period furniture. It is only recent scholarship that has suggested otherwise.

CHAPTER 3

Other Factors that Influenced the Interpretation of Period Arrangements

There are several other issues that are important to consider when trying to understand why the Colonial Revivalists did what they did. The one hundred and fifty years between the American Revolution and the beginning of the Colonial Williamsburg restoration saw the development of plant and flower use in the American home. Without the many advances described below, the Revivalists would not have been able to suggest flower arrangements for period interiors.

Availability and the Commercial Horticultural Industry

A brief history of commercial horticulture in the United States is relevant to this discussion for several reasons. First, the availability of flowers necessarily determines their use. Second, the introduction of foreign varieties and the naturalization and hybridization of native flowers is important when determining what constitutes an historically accurate eighteenth-century arrangement. Finally, the seasonal and geographical accessibility known in the twentieth century may have encouraged the introduction of cut flowers into settings where they had rarely previously appeared.

English colonists settled coastal areas of America during the early seventeenth century. As soon as they arrived they established

gardens. They knew they had to produce their own food immediately to replace or supplement the limited supply from the ships' stores. The settlers brought with them seeds from their homeland, thus introducing new plants to this continent. They also made use of what they found here. But the colonists rarely had a surplus of seeds from season to season. This forced them to rely heavily on England for their supply of seeds. This persisted for many years, leaving the colonists dependent upon England for their stock of plants and vegetables.¹ The Pilgrims did attempt to trade marketable herbs with their homeland, but found that most of the varieties they encountered in New England had already reached Europe by way of French settlers in Canada. This reinforced the one-sidedness of England's seed trade.²

The documentation for seventeenth-century American gardens suggests that fruit was the primary crop. Fruit trees and berry bushes grew continuously through the year, even though they produced fruit seasonally. It was an easier product to manage while the settlers were getting used to their new surroundings. Herbs and edible greens were the next most important crop because they were the basis for medicine. Flowers, including roses, marigolds, and yarrow, were sometimes included in this group, and rarely were considered ornamentals.³ As L. H. Bailey stated in the *Standard Cyclopedia of Horticulture*, referring to flower use in the house, "The

¹ Dorothy Manks, "How the American Nursery Trade Began," *Origins of American Horticulture: A Handbook*, (Brooklyn, NY: Brooklyn Botanic Garden, 1968) 4.

² Ann Leighton, *Early American Gardens: "For Meate or Medicine,"* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1970) 37.

³ Leighton, 19-21.

early colonists were an extremely practical people and paid little attention to the distinctly ornamental features about the home."⁴

Early accounts of the new world by botanists listed some of the new plants discovered by seventeenth- and eighteenth-century explorers. For example, the journals of Adrian Van der Donck (?-1655), Peter Kalm (1716-1779), Mark Catesby (c.1679-1749), John Josselyn (?-1675), John Tradescant (1608-1662), John Bartram (1699-1777), and William Bartram (1739-1823) described native flowers and other vegetation new to the English and European settlers and visitors. By the eighteenth century, more equal trade between England and the colonies existed, mostly between wealthy individuals. John Bartram was easily the most important of these men. He began his botanical gardens in Philadelphia in 1728, and traded with English colleagues throughout his life.⁵

The Virginia colonists were very aware of the gardens fashionable in England in the seventeenth and eighteenth century and tried to emulate England's elegant example.⁶ This ambitious undertaking was often thwarted by the plants themselves. In the mid-eighteenth century, John Custis, the largest importer of plants in the Tidewater region during his lifetime, wrote to his supplier in England about some seeds he had received that season. He complained, "All the acceptable seeds you sent me never came up except a very few which came to nothing notwithstanding I kept three strong Nigros

⁴ L. H. Bailey, *Standard Cyclopedia of Horticulture*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1915) 1242.

⁵ Manks, 4.

⁶ Susan Pulbrook and Rosamund Gould, *The Gracious Art of Flower Arrangement*, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1968) 11.

continually filling large tubs of water and put them in the sun and watered plentifully every night, made shades and arbors all over the garden allmost; but the abundance of the things perished."⁷ This letter suggests that not only were some seeds not acceptable when they arrived, but that even those that appeared to be in good condition were unreliable.

The first modern commercial nursery in the American colonies opened in 1737. Run by Robert Prince and his family in Flushing, New York, the business began on the intercolonial level. Soon the Prince nursery was trading native American plants to England in exchange for highly sought after European novelties. They bred some fruits and roses at the nursery, but concentrated primary on the seed and bulb trade. Of course, this was the way plants generally traveled across the Atlantic because cuttings and small plants often were mishandled, damaged and even destroyed by the journey across the ocean.⁸

In the South, plantations raised products that could be sold for profit, including cotton, indigo, rice and tobacco. The only Southern town large enough to support a market for farm produce in the 17th and 18th centuries was Charleston. Two commercial nurseries were opened there by the middle of the eighteenth century; Henry Laurens's in 1755 and John Watson's in 1763. Laurens was responsible for introducing olives, capers, limes, ginger, red raspberries, blue grapes, and many other unique products to the

⁷ Joan Parry Dutton, *The Flower World of Williamsburg*, (Williamsburg, VA: The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1962) 55.

⁸ Manks, 5.

colonies.⁹ Both carried a wide variety of plants that would grow in the climate, although both were forced to close at the advent of the Revolutionary War.¹⁰

According to one present-day authority, the "eighteenth century was one of singular lethargy in American agriculture."¹¹ Methods and tools stayed the same for years and years. It took American independence to bring organization to agriculture and horticulture in this country. After the War, the Continental Congress decided that a network of post roads was needed to connect the newly formed states. By 1787, Concord, New Hampshire, was linked to Augusta, Georgia, and cities as far west as Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, were connected to coastal areas. Before this, only towns with ports or on navigable rivers had much contact with Europe or even each other.

Postal roads were expanded 83-fold between 1790 and 1840. This tremendous increase only helped the distribution of goods and information. However, one must be cautious in assuming that the country was suddenly accessible. In his book, *Urban Growth and the Circulation of Information*, Allan R. Pred discussed just this issue. He noted:

Yet one pretelegraphic postal route mile was not automatically equal with another, since there were important differences in road quality, means and speed of conveyance, the frequency of service. In the early nineteenth century, 'many post roads were

⁹ Alice G. B. Lockwood, *Gardens of Colony and State*, vol. 2, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons for the Garden Club of America, 1934) 209.

¹⁰ Manks, 4.

¹¹ U. P. Hedrick, *A History of Horticulture in America to 1860*, (Portland, Oregon: Timber Press, 1988) 145.

scarcely more than bridle paths, while others, such as the Boston Post Road out of New York through coastal Connecticut, were heavily traveled by coach and post riders' and were usually, but not invariably, less treacherous.¹²

As roads slowly began to increase access between places and farmers found a new market for their products, the techniques of budding and grafting started to gain acceptance here.¹³ As Dorothy S. Manks stated in her article, "How the American Nursery Trade Began,"

In all phases of horticulture there was, from the beginning, a time lag of nearly a century between England and America in the acceptance of new practices. This was due in part to the isolation of America, in part, no doubt, to local conservatism. Although the soils and climates of the New World were quite different from those of the Old, it was not until the early 19th century that an American way of gardening evolved.¹⁴

One event that spurred on the development of the horticultural industry was the success of several experiments carried out by John Champney of Charleston, South Carolina. In 1816, Champney fertilized the seed of a Western musk rose with a Chinese blush rose. The result was an exotic hybrid still known as the *Blush Noisette*.¹⁵ Ann Leighton discussed the event:

¹² Allan R. Pred, *Urban Growth and the Circulation of Information: The United States System of Cities, 1790-1840*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973) 83-4.

¹³ Manks, 7. In 1629, John Parkinson (in *Paradisi in Sole Paradisus Terrestris*, London: 1629) had discussed the acceptance of these new techniques in England.

¹⁴ Manks, 6-7.

¹⁵ Lockwood, vol. 2, 19.

After quiet periods in plant importation, when only the most earnest explorers and settlers of the New World could be relied upon for anything new, the introduction of Chinese and Indian plants began to stir the English garden world. And the American. It was actually an early nineteenth-century gentleman in South Carolina, Mr. Champney, who first succeeded in crossing an ever-blooming Chinese rose with a once-blooming European rose. When the brilliant and exotic contributions to gardens from South Africa and Brazil and Mexico flooded in to aid the Victorian gardeners in their passion for space-filling at all costs, cultivation under glass had become a recourse for high and low alike, and "bedding-out" could be indulged in to an endless and hideous degree.¹⁶

The early nineteenth century also saw the development of Horticultural Societies, in both America and in England. The London Society was the first to organize, holding its inaugural meeting in 1804. New York followed, founding its group in 1818; Pennsylvania and Massachusetts were next beginning meetings in 1827 and 1830 respectively. These organizations had difficulty surviving during the first half of the century, a fact that is indicative of the state of the industry. But by 1850, there were journals and published materials attesting to the strength and importance of these institutions. They promoted the field further.¹⁷

Shaker communities were some of the earliest to develop a specific flower seed trade. During the first quarter of the nineteenth century, they began to grow and produce seeds which they packaged in paper packets and sold to neighboring communities. Distribution

¹⁶ Leighton, 14-15.

¹⁷ Lockwood, vol. 2, 28.

was limited to areas accessible to wagons from their production areas; this meant primarily New York state.¹⁸ Although it was "contrary to orders to grow flowers," they got around the issue by promoting flowers as useful plants. Poppies had medicinal uses, other flowers were considered edible.¹⁹

It was also during the nineteenth century that horticulture began to emerge as distinct from agriculture. Horticulture became more associated with urban ideas while agriculture remained the emphasis in rural communities. Class structure was changing; a large, stable middle-class population had been well established. These people began to adopt the leisurely activities of the upper classes. Gardening was definitely one of these past-times. People who now could afford to do so, grew ornamentals in their gardens, including special trees, shrubs and flowers. Businesses began to specialize in this new field, catering to those of means. The first seed and florist shop opened in 1802 in New York. Four years later a shop opened in Philadelphia that carried some 1,000 English and native American varieties. These businesses grew all their plants in flower pots and averaged 50,000 square feet of glass in their greenhouses.²⁰

Even with the introduction of these establishments, public demand took time to develop. *The Philadelphia Florist and Horticultural Journal* noted in 1852 that:

Horticultural Science in this country is yet in its infancy. We have not yet arrived at that point of

¹⁸ Manks, 6.

¹⁹ Hedrick, 205.

²⁰ Manks, 8.

luxury which lavishes on the park, the conservatory, and on the gentlemen's kitchen and fruit gardens, sums equal to the income of some of our richest men. Nor will the demand for such things here permit of such vast nursery establishments as are to be found in England, or on the continent.²¹

Due to the lack of demand, it was not until late in the century that hardy annuals and perennials for small, private flower gardens were grown commonly.²²

During the second half of the nineteenth century, Peter Henderson (1822-1890) was the leading authority on floriculture in this country. His writings suggest that until the end of the nineteenth century, most flowers grown commercially were small and short-stemmed, for example camellia, bouvardia, heliotrope, tuberose, and mignonette.²³ This claim is further substantiated by nineteenth-century horticultural journals that focussed on nurseries specializing in cut flowers. Short-stemmed flowers were well suited for bouquets and corsages, which were the uses to which most cut flowers were put.²⁴

Florists began to grow long-stemmed varieties of roses, carnations, and chrysanthemums for consumers after 1870. These longer-stemmed flowers were expensive; in 1888, a rosebud cost one dollar compared to a short-stemmed camellia which cost ten cents. This period also saw unusual or recently introduced varieties garnering

²¹ "Requirements of Horticulture in the U.S.," *The Philadelphia Florist and Horticultural Journal*, vol.1 (December 1852): 254.

²² Hedrick, 276.

²³ Hedrick, 267.

²⁴ "Garden Memoranda," *Philadelphia Florist and Horticultural Journal*, vol. 1, no. 10, (1853): 316-17.

popularity. The "newly come" chrysanthemum was the flower in greatest demand, surpassing all the above mentioned.²⁵ A second factor that contributed to cost was the development of shops devoted exclusively to the sale of flowers. The separation of production and marketing made the product more available to the public in many ways, but the inclusion of a middle man also raised the price per stem.²⁶

The end of the nineteenth century brought scientific improvements to the field. The advances developed in the areas of cultural conditioning and plant breeding revolutionized the industry. Varieties of flowers were developed specifically for flower arranging. L. H. Bailey wrote,

The early part of the twentieth century, however, witnessed a deluge of new varieties in practically all species. Breeding and improved cultural methods brought the qualities of the products far above anything produced in the previous century. Large-flowered carnations on long, stiff stems, violets of much larger sizes, and improved strains of chrysanthemums, roses and other species gave a remarkable impetus to the industry.²⁷

By the turn of the twentieth century, commercial horticulture and floriculture were thriving industries. Flowers were available in cities and towns across the country for everyday use in one's home. U. P. Hedrick, author of *A History of Horticulture in America to 1860*,

²⁵ Hedrick, 267-8.

²⁶ Alex D. C. Kiplinger Laurie and Kennard S. Nelson, *Commercial Flower Forcing*, 6th ed., (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1958) 1.

²⁷ Bailey, 1242.

insisted, "The year 1800 may be set as the time when horticulture in all its branches began to bud - the full flower can hardly be said to have opened until at least a hundred years later."²⁸ And it was only after this that the practitioners of the Colonial Revival could utilize flowers the way they did.

What does all this mean in terms of the use of cut flowers during the Colonial Revival? It points out several important things. First, in 17th- and 18th-century America flowers were a luxury. A few choice varieties may have been cultivated in the gardens of those who could afford the time and expense, but these were probably chosen for their medicinal properties or strong scent. Any flowers brought home to adorn colonial interiors were wild. They were short stemmed and probably more fragile than the flowers known to us today.

During the nineteenth century, nurseries and florist shops made available types of flowers unknown in Colonial America, including hybridized and scientifically engineered varieties of older species. Lists of historical plants do exist, and can be consulted for ideas on the types of flowers appropriate to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries for different geographical locations.²⁹ However, it should not be assumed that flowers now considered commonplace in arrangements were characteristic of a given time and place. Buying

²⁸ Hedrick, 197.

²⁹ See Scott G. Kunst and Arthur O. Tucker's article, " 'Where Have All the Flowers Gone?' A Preliminary List of Origination Lists for Ornamental Plants," APT Bulletin, no. 2, (1989): 43-50.

a bouquet at the florist and showing off the blossoms in a historic interior today is a gross misrepresentation.

Finally, the growth of the commercial horticulture industry made flowers available to gardeners. It was not until the second half of the nineteenth century that one could go to the corner shop and pick up a bunch of flowers; a novelty at the time, by the first decades of the twentieth century the practice was commonplace. Also, it would have been easy to buy seeds, bulbs, and cuttings; quality had increased with commercialization. Even amateur gardeners had some guarantee that the shoots they planted would come up. Increased quality, availability, and a more general knowledge of floriculture encouraged the use of flowers in many ways.

The Proliferation of Plant Materials Used in the House

With increased availability of plant materials came increased use of plants in the home. The nineteenth century saw many a parlor or sitting room become overgrown with house plants and greenery--at least by eighteenth-century standards. Cut flowers also enjoyed increased use as Victorian Americans developed a new aesthetic in home decoration.

As the nineteenth century began, it was possible for people of means in urban areas to acquire cut flowers for occasions. Consider, for example, the preparations made by Eliza Susan Quincy of Boston for a party on April 21, 1819. Quincy sent for flowers from the Botanical Gardens, "with which were decorated our drawing rooms,- placing them in vases on the mantelpieces, and in glass vases over

the folding doors which were surmounted by a fan light."³⁰ Vases on the mantel seem to have been the primary location for cut flowers during the first quarter of the nineteenth century. Arrangements were still rare features, but when illustrated they appear most frequently in the parlor and drawing room. John Lewis Krimmel's "Quilting Frolic" (1813) and Henry Sargent's "The Tea Party" (1821), both depict flowers in vases placed on the mantelshelves.³¹ These images suggest--as does Quincy's letter--that flowers were often associated with special events. It is also important to note that these images depict two very different levels of sophistication. Krimmel painted the country village while Sargent painted the fashionable city. Yet, both images depict an identical practice.

By the second quarter of the nineteenth century, flower arrangements began to appear more frequently in paintings and illustrations.³² This change corresponds to the development of the floriculture industry. The bouquets were small and placed in simple vases, the preferred holder throughout the nineteenth century. The paintings were often commissioned by wealthy individuals and therefore depict a select manner of living, thus confirming the suspicion that flowers were a luxury until much later in the century. The Krimmel painting just discussed may be an exception to the rule,

³⁰ Elisabeth Garrett, *At Home: The American Family 1750-1870*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1990) 162.

³¹ "The Quilting Frolic" by John Lewis Krimmel (oil on canvas) depicts the Philadelphia area in 1813. It was reproduced in Milo M. Naeve, *John Lewis Krimmel: An Artist in Federal America*, (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 1987) 69. "The Tea Party" by Henry Sargent (oil on canvas) depicts 10 Franklin Place in Boston in 1821. It was reproduced in Garrett, 47.

³² William Seale, *Recreating the Historic House Interior*, (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1979) 100.

however. Literary works also reflect the increased use of flowers and plant materials indoors, as well. A poem by Lydia H. Sigourney published in 1838 is a fine example of this. It reads:

The flowers, the dear familiar flowers, that in thy
garden grew,
From which thy mantel vases was filled, methinks
they breathe anew.³³

However, use was neither immediate nor universal. In June, 1864, *Godey's Lady's Book* noted:

'It has long been a matter of surprise,' says an observant and tasteful writer, 'to observe how very seldom we find any use made of the actual products of our woods and fields, of things which may be found occupying the earth or air of our own country, or even the deep seas that surround our shores, in ornamenting our houses. We do sometimes find cases of stuffed birds, or animals, or preserved butterflies and beetles, and more frequently a little stand of geraniums. Even flowers are neglected. Go into the houses of twenty of the most elegant and educated people who live near you, and in how many will you find flowers upon their tables? They will show you their conservatories and greenhouses full of gorgeous blossoms, but you will find none brightening the dull marble slabs in the drawing room, or, if you do, they will be the clumsily-arranged bunches which the servants have received from the gardener, and placed there without any attention to the graces of form and harmony of coloring.'³⁴

³³ Lockwood, vol. 1, 248-9.

³⁴ "House Gardening - No. 6," *Godey's Lady's Book and Magazine*, vol. 58, (June 1859) 572.

This quote suggests that even in 1864 flowers were a luxury enjoyed mainly by the wealthy and fashionable.

It also suggests that parlors and dining rooms were the spaces where flowers should be placed; bed chambers were not. Through much of the nineteenth century, most people believed that flowers, trees, and plants competed with humans for oxygen and emitted harmful gases, especially at night. The fear associated with this phenomenon is apparent in pronouncements such as the following:

In closed and darkened apartments, and in the night, flowers which are so delightful to the eye throw off quantities of carbonic acid gas, which mixes with and poisons the atmosphere; and, to add to the evil, in the night while the leaves are distributing the unwholesome carbonic acid, they absorb largely the oxygen of the atmosphere; and in this way, in a close apartment, flowers have precisely the same effect as human beings sleeping. Fatal results are said to have arisen from this cause.³⁵

Readers were advised to keep flowers out of bedrooms and to close off at night areas where flowers were displayed.

While nineteenth-century magazines for women extolled the joy flowers could add to one's home in the winter months, they also were aware of problems. In December, 1847, *Godey's Lady's Book* noted,

Cold winter is coming, and age steals on: the flowers will fade, the young must become old. But they who call fill their veins with every hopeful healthy thing around them, those who imbibe the sunshine of the future and transfuse life from realities not come as

³⁵ "The Management of Flowers in Dwellings," *Godey's Lady's Book and Magazine*, vol. 68, (June 1864) 548.

yet, their blood need never freeze. And such love flowers in winter, and with a little pain and care may always have a sweet, bright friend in their parlor windows, smiling like spring, when all is cheerless abroad.³⁶

Authorities were sympathetic to the housewife who had trouble sustaining plants and flowers. *Godey's Lady's Book* acknowledged in 1851 that keeping plants healthy was a difficult problem. The magazine noted that, "where there are greenhouses and frames, and a regular gardener is kept, or where a florist is paid to supply plants, it is easy to keep up a brilliant show the greater part of the year by changing the plants every week; but this is cutting the Gordian knot instead of untying it, and does not throw any light in the real difficulties of the case."³⁷ In later issues, *Godey's* offered simple home remedies like adding spirits of camphor to the water to extend plant life.³⁸

Another matter of importance when discussing the increased use of plants and flowers in the nineteenth-century home involves heating technology. By the first quarter of the nineteenth century stoves--a more efficient means of heating living spaces than open fireplaces--were common in parlors and sitting rooms of prosperous American homes. Flowers and other plants were more apt to survive in better heated spaces because they froze in unheated spaces.³⁹

³⁶ "Editors' Table," *Godey's Lady's Book*, vol. 35, (December 1847) 330-1.

³⁷ "Window and Balcony Gardens," *Godey's Lady's Book*, vol. 42, (February 1851) 117-8.

³⁸ "Arrangement of Flowers," *Godey's Lady's Book*, vol. 92, (June 1876) 563.

³⁹ Garrett, 72-3.

Stoves only heated pockets of air, so the placement of flowers and greenery around the chimney opening and stove made perfect sense.

Furnaces were introduced in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, but were not common. They were gravity fed and not very efficient. Those who were lucky enough to have such technological advances in their homes still faced the possibility of freezing inkwells in un-heated spaces. In the late-nineteenth-century Boston home of Samuel Eliot Morison, "the hot-air furnace only reached the second floor anyway; in that era, urban homes were generally heated by the furnace in the cellar and supplementary grates burning anthracite coal in the parlors and chambers."⁴⁰ It was really not until the final quarter of the nineteenth century with the acceptance of a true central heating system that "many a sitting room was transformed into a garden - if not a jungle - as trailing ivy and other vines twined themselves about the apartment."⁴¹ Central heating created an environment where plants and flowers could flourish. Without the worry of plants being damaged by the cold or of water turning to ice in a favorite vase, home owners began to value the presence of greenery in their living spaces.

By the 1870's, flowers and plants, "besides being organic and thus aesthetically appealing, were the proud symbols of the vigilant housewife."⁴² Magazines like *Godey's* and *Peterson's* urged women to exercise good taste by displaying plants in their homes.⁴³ The art

⁴⁰ Garrett, 188.

⁴¹ Garrett, 73.

⁴² William Seale, *The Tasteful Interlude: American Interiors through the Camera's Eye, 1860-1917*, Second ed., (Nashville: The American Association for State and Local History, 1981) 60.

⁴³ "Arranging Bouquets," *Peterson's Magazine*, vol. 72, (August 1877) 152-3.

of arranging flowers was considered a desirable talent. Suggestions for placement and variety of arrangements prompted home owners to embellish their interiors more and more, highlighting lighting devices or particular furniture pieces.⁴⁴ Period photographs confirm this.⁴⁵

Finally, by looking at statistics from the sale of flower pots during the nineteenth century the increase in the use of plants and flowers becomes very apparent. A. H. Hews of Cambridge, Massachusetts manufactured flower pots at his family's business which began in 1765. Hews described that between 1788 and 1810, accounts for the sales of pots covered "about as many pages as we now often use in one single day; and the amount in dollars and cents does not compare with single sales of the year 1894." Hews reports a ten-to-one increase in sales between 1869 and 1894, noting that "in round numbers, 700,000 flower-pots in the former year and 7,000,000 in the later; and if the same factory can in 1920, twenty-five years later, produce and sell 70,000,000, we shall verily be living in a land of flowers."⁴⁶ The demand for pots to hold plants and flowers increased dramatically, corresponding directly to common use.

⁴⁴ Geoffrey L. Rossano, *Creating a Dignified Past: Museums and the Colonial Revival*, (Savage, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1991) 34.

⁴⁵ In Seale's *The Tasteful Interlude*, 74 photographs are shown from the 1873-1893 period. Of these, 39 show flowers and plants in the interiors. pp.56-127.

⁴⁶ Bailey, 1519.

Publications and Household Guides Promoting Plant Use

Where did Americans get the ideas for using more plants and flowers in their homes? How was the new horticultural industry supported and the public encouraged to experiment with these materials when decorating their homes? One way was through the extensive publications made available to middle-class consumers during the second half of the nineteenth century. Books and magazines were very influential in promoting the use of cut flowers in domestic interiors.

The first book written exclusively about American flowers was Joseph Breck's *The Flower Garden* (Boston: 1851). Although this text was written primarily for the gardener, Breck was an early advocate of displaying flowers from one's own garden inside. He wrote:

There are a variety of things pleasing to the eye of man, - some of them expensive and not within the reach of all; but flowers may, without much expense, be possessed by the humblest individual. Their cultivation may be made one source of happiness to the family. Let heads of families gather around them every source of innocent amusement and recreation for their children. They should endeavor to make their home attractive and lovely, in doors and out, - a paradise, if possible.⁴⁷

Interestingly enough, in 1866 when Breck issued a revised edition of his guide entitled *The New Book of Flowers*, he included a section on flower arranging at the request of his readers. The advice was not his own; he actually claimed to know nothing about formal arranging.

⁴⁷ Joseph Breck, *The Flower Garden*, (Boston, John P. Jewett & Company, 1851) 16.

He chose to publish the suggestions made by a Parisian newspaper that he had read. And he made quite a point of saying that the technique reported was based on foreign practices.⁴⁸

Between 1850 and the turn of the century, hundreds of books giving advice on home decoration and proper housekeeping flooded the United States. These publications not only discussed furniture styles and the latest designs for window treatments, but offered thoughts on embellishing and accessorizing living spaces. House plants and flowers were very much a part of this movement. Catharine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe urged readers of *The American Woman's Home* (1869) to keep ferns and mosses in their homes, because they were inexpensive yet educational.⁴⁹ In *The House Beautiful* (1878), Clarence Cook illustrated flowers in vases on desks, mantel-pieces, and small tables for corners.⁵⁰ Charles Eastlake, the most influential of these writers, told readers of *Hints on Household Taste* (1868):

A well-appointed dinner-table is one of the triumphs of an English housewife's domestic care. That the cloth shall be of fine and snow-white damask; that the decanters and wine-glasses shall be delicate in form and of purest quality; that the silver shall look as bright and spotless as when it first came wrapped in tissue paper from the silversmith's; that the *epergne* shall be filled with choicest flowers--these are points which she will consider of as much importance as the dainty

⁴⁸ Joseph Breck, *The New Book of Flowers*, (New York: Orange Judd & Company, 1866) 47.

⁴⁹ Catharine E. Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe, *The American Woman's Home*, (Hartford, CT: The Stowe-Day Foundation, 1991) 102-3..

⁵⁰ Clarence Cook, *The House Beautiful: Essays on Beds and Tables, Stools and Candlesticks*, (New York: Scribner, Armstrong and Company, 1878) 76, 88, 125.

skill of the cook's art itself.⁵¹

In addressing the needs of the modern housewife, Eastlake was acknowledging that women were the primary decorators of their homes, a trend stemming from at least the middle of the century. The attention paid to interior decoration in women's magazines of the period confirms that women were interested in the latest trends.⁵² Periodicals like *Godey's Lady's Book* and *Peterson's Magazine* offered readers the latest in fashion and good taste.⁵³ It can be well-imagined that after reading statements such as, "No ornament is so appropriate for the dinner-table or mantel as a vase of flowers," subscribers increased their use of flowers for decorating.⁵⁴

Godey's also offered a buying service after 1851. By sending descriptions of the desired products, readers could have the newest products delivered to their homes. *Godey's* relied upon express companies to transport the goods. William F. Harnden had started the first of these businesses in 1839. He offered service from Boston to New York and Albany with connections to southern cities, leaving once a week by boat or train. Demand caused other companies to form to carry the packages and valuables that others--such as the

⁵¹ Charles L. Eastlake, *Hints on Household Taste in Furniture, Upholstery, and Other Details*, (Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, 1876) 285.

⁵² William B. Rhoads, *The Colonial Revival*, vol. 1, (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1977) 425-6.

⁵³ According to Frank Luther Mott's *A History of American Magazines*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), *Godey's Lady's Book* (1830-1892) was the most prominent women's magazine of its period for four reasons: the prominence of its contributors, the way it encouraged writers, its popular success, and its influence on its competitors. (vol.1, 350-51) *Peterson's Magazine* was started in 1842 to compete with *Godey's*. It was also very popular and by 1862, it had the largest circulation of any women's magazine in the United States. (vol. 2, 309)

⁵⁴ "Arrangement of Flowers," *Godey's Lady's Book*, vol. 92, (June 1876) 563.

Postal service--refused.⁵⁵ The response of *Godey's* readers to the buying services was overwhelming; it allowed even those living far from the fashionable centers "to procure articles of the latest fashion."⁵⁶ Among the items offered were plant cabinets, wardian cases, and flower shades.

To further encourage plant and flower use in the American home, Godey announced in 1862, that Henry A. Dreer, a Philadelphia nurseryman who wrote columns on gardening for the *Lady's Book*, would ship seeds and cuttings to those who wished by express companies.⁵⁷ This made it possible for the consumer to order not only the fashionable means of displaying the plants, but new and exotic varieties of plants as well.

Not everyone could afford to order special accessories for the home. For some families, advice literature provided instructions for making many of the embellishments at home. As Agnes Bailey Ormsbee wrote in *The House Comfortable* (1892), "In giving a home-like air by means of decorative touches present effect is desired rather than durability. Now warmth and richness of tone depend more upon other elements than upon the cost of the materials with which they are produced."⁵⁸ When applied to decorating with flowers, do-it-yourself guides suggested methods of preserving

⁵⁵ Alden Hatch, *American Express: A Century of Service*, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1950) 17-18. The author is indebted to Gail Caskey Winkler for bringing this source to her attention.

⁵⁶ Gail Caskey Winkler, *Influence of Godey's "Lady's Book" on the American Woman and Her Home: Contributions to a National Culture (1830-1877)*, Ph.D. Dissertation (University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1988) 214.

⁵⁷ Winkler, 174.

⁵⁸ Agnes Bailey Ormsbee, *The House Comfortable*, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1892) 5-6.

home-grown flowers, of drying or waxing flowers, and of constructing holders and wall pockets for display.⁵⁹

Guides that discussed flower decoration exclusively offered tips for the gardener, the consumer, and the amateur. As Henry T. Williams wrote in his book, *Window Gardening*:

A subject like this [decorating the home with ornamental plants and cut flowers] is one of intense interest to the American flower loving public. Formerly little was done in the encouragement of it, because we all, like amateurs, and beginners, knew little of the best plants and methods, and waited to learn from those more experienced... ..The amateurs have outstripped the professionals in the rapidity of their progress, and the prettiest rooms to-day are embellished by the fingers of a fair plant lover, who a year before did not know one flower from another.⁶⁰

In *Floral Decoration for the Dwelling House* (1876), Anne Hassard detailed how to make new leaves for dining room tables that would allow ferns and flowers placed below to pierce the table's center. She also examined the issue of lighting and how the placement of gas fixtures in a room should determine the size, height, and shape of floral decorations. Another chapter discussed the care of fresh flowers, cleaning and cutting methods, and temperature issues. The book was deemed a complete guide for the "lady or amateur."⁶¹

⁵⁹ Mrs. C. S. Jones and Henry T. Williams, *Household Elegancies: Suggestions in Household Art and Tasteful Home Decoration*, (New York: Henry T. Williams, Publisher, 1875).

⁶⁰ Henry T. Williams, ed., *Window Gardening*, 4th ed., (New York: Henry T. Williams, Publisher, 1872) 247.

⁶¹ Anne Hassard, *Floral Decoration for the Dwelling House*, (New York: MacMillan and Co., 1876).

This is only a sampling of the publications available. Homeowners were surely "bewildered by the vast selection of goods available and styles suggested in the guidebooks."⁶² These books and magazines were another push for Americans to increase plant and flower use in their homes.

The Influence of Ikebana on Western Flower Arranging Practices

Finally, Japanese flower design has dramatically influenced the way we arrange flowers. As Julia S. Berrall suggested in her *History of Flower Arranging*, Americans are trained to arrange flowers in a manner based more on Oriental aesthetics than on European. We make composed arrangements, stressing form, line, and color. The final product is "more studied than those in European flower arrangements."⁶³ It is important to consider the history and the introduction of *Ikebana* into American practices because elements of arranging that are taken for granted today came directly from this Japanese art.

The art of flower preservation is believed to have begun in China during the first century of the Christian Era. Buddhist priests are believed to have suggested the prolonging of the flowers' lives in adherence to the same Buddhist doctrines that discouraged the "wanton sacrifice of life." Cut flowers were placed in water inside

⁶² Edgar deN. Mayhew and Minor Myers, Jr., *Documentary History of American Interiors from the Colonial Era to 1915*, (New York: Scribner's, 1980) 197.

⁶³ Julia S. Berrall, *A History of Flower Arranging*, revised ed., (New York: The Viking Press, 1968) 9.

cool temples. "The Buddhist priests whilst being faithful to their rules of conduct were, at the same time, laying the foundation of flower arranging, knowingly or unknowingly."⁶⁴

These ideas were carried to Japan by Buddhist priests, where Shotoko Taishi, a Buddhist reformer, a prince, and the son of Emperor Yomei, is thought to have originated flower arranging. From the name of the priests' dwelling, *ike no bo* meaning "the hut near the pond," came the name of the school of thought that governed flower arranging, *Ikenobo*. Rules of design developed slowly, as did the school. In the year 1545, a treatise entitled *Ikenobo-sen'ei densho* laid down the names, proportions and placement of seven principle branches or stems for an arrangement. Each stem signified an element of the landscape. Perspective was not a concern as these works were intended to only make a suggestion of the whole.⁶⁵ Much was left to the imagination. During the eighteenth century, simplified styles of arranging developed. Many of these developing disciplines relied on asymmetry, using three primary stems to represent heaven, earth, and man.⁶⁶ It should be noted that the various schools of thought that developed were all in basic agreement about the basic principles of flower arranging. Where they differed was in their "treatment of details and in the preference for or avoidance of certain vessels."⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Betty Massingham, *Flower Arranging in Colour*, (London: Paul Hamlin) 145.

⁶⁵ John March-Penney, *Japanese Flower Arrangement: Ikebana*, (New York: Hamlyn, 1969) 136.

⁶⁶ March-Penney, 137.

⁶⁷ A. L. Sadler, *The Art of Flower Arrangement in Japan: A Sketch of its History and Development*, (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1933) 17.

Commodore Perry sailed into Uraga harbor in 1854. Shortly thereafter trade agreements were signed with the West, opening Japan to Europe and America. Prints, woodblocks, and other art forms began to influence western arts. Japanese flower arrangements were part of the displays at the London International Exhibition in 1862. Simplicity and the emphasis on line and form affected everyone who saw the exhibit, and "it had some impact among the intellectuals as they started placing a few flowers simply in upright vases with their new simplified furniture, part of a reaction to the prevailing mass style of flowing epergnes."⁶⁸

The late nineteenth century was a time of great awareness of Asian culture in America as well. The Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia (1876) and the Columbian Exposition in Chicago (1893) exhibited art and architecture of the Orient. Japanese motifs appeared in wallpaper and fabric designs; prints and pictures influenced by Japanese aesthetics were also very popular.⁶⁹ Some historians have suggested reasons for the interest in the Japanese:

Public enthusiasm for things Asian was thus partially rooted in the conviction that the Japanese in particular were in some ways "healthier," or at least more serene than westerners. Few Americans respected or wished to emulate the governments of Japan and China, nor did they want the people of either country to settle in the United States. But in the eclectic manner that characterized popular culture throughout the century, Americans thought it useful

⁶⁸ Iris Webb, editor, *The Complete Guide to Flower and Foliage Arrangement*, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1979) 240.

⁶⁹ Gail Caskey Winkler and Roger W. Moss, *Victorian Interior Decoration: American Interiors 1830-1900*, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1986) 140-142.

and proper to include Oriental goods in their homes, in part for the sense of serenity they connoted.⁷⁰

And what element of design depicts serenity better than flowers?

The turn of the century brought a final step in the development of Japanese *Ikebana*. A new style called *moribana* was developed by Ushin Ohara. Using flowers of the East and West in triad compositions, the style added color and a decorative quality to Japanese forms. *Moribana* became immensely popular, not just in Japan, but in the United States. It also introduced a new type of holder, the *kenzan* which is a pinholder in a low dish.⁷¹ This technical breakthrough allowed water to get to the stems while holding them securely in place.

The introduction of *Ikebana* technique was very influential. Aside from the great interest in the Orient, flower arrangers quickly adapted the basic principles of unity, scale, balance, harmony, rhythm, and accent.⁷² Julia Berrall has noted:

When the garden-club movement really got into full swing in our country in the 1920's, members began looking for rules whereby flowers could be arranged to the best advantage. As a result of considerable observation on the part of garden enthusiasts who traveled around the world and saw how flowers were utilized for decoration in other countries, certain rules became accepted. The first and best known of these, that a flower arrangement should be at least one and a half times the height of the container, is taken verbatim from

⁷⁰ Rossano, 13-14.

⁷¹ Webb, 240

⁷² F.F. Rockwell and Esther C. Grayson, *The Rockwells' New Complete Book of Flower Arrangement*, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1960) 55-67.

the Japanese.⁷³

But it was not just the garden clubs that used *Ikebana*; advocates of using flowers in the home commented frequently on the Japanese commitment to the art. Frank K. Balthis, author of *Plants in the Home*, wrote in 1942,

Proficiency in arranging flowers comes from study. The Japanese spend seven years apprenticeship in learning how to arrange flowers and branches. One of the greatest faults lies in spacing the flowers evenly and in using too many. Frequently cavities in floral arrangements may be removed by merely bending the flower stems. An uneven outline is much more effective in an informal arrangement because the bouquet does not require absolute balance. If there is one decided spot with a gorgeous end, or a lovely center, it is not necessary to balance the other end.⁷⁴

All of Balthis's advice was based on Japanese design.

Of course, many took the elements of *Ikebana* and "Americanized" them. Women's magazines were the most successful at spreading these ideas. Articles such as "Arranging cut flowers as they do in Japan" and "How the Japanese preserve cut flowers," both of which appeared in *House and Garden* in the 1930's, urged Americans to put more emphasis on form, and stressed that *seasonal* arrangements could enhance one's home.⁷⁵ By 1939, these articles had become "Flowers arranged the American Way," although the illustrations

⁷³ Berrall, 8.

⁷⁴ Frank K. Balthis, *Plants in the Home*, (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1942) 109-110.

⁷⁵ Mary Louisa Butcher, "Arranging Flowers as they do in Japan," *House and Garden*, (March 1932) 44, 80, 82. Mitsu Arai, "How the Japanese preserve cut flowers," *House and Garden*, (April 1934) 38-9, 84.

nearly duplicated those in the earlier articles.⁷⁶ J. Gregory Conway suggested in *Flowers: East-West* (1939) that the act of Americans trying to create arrangements with a Japanese feel made them intrinsically American. He pointed out that if, "a careful integration be made between Eastern and Western compositions, individual designs in flowers will be developed to harmonize with the interior of the Western home. Tempered as life is in the West with an almost solemn wonder toward nature, the expression of nature cannot be the same as found in the East, but is characteristically Western."⁷⁷

Let us return to the arrangement's of Louise Fisher at Colonial Williamsburg. Although she used Western flowers and claimed her arrangements were done in the "eighteenth-century manner," they were clearly influenced by Japanese design principles. Fisher made several arrangements in the 1953 film, *Flower Arrangements of Williamsburg*. The first, a large fan shaped composition in a pewter chalice for the family dining room at the Governor's Palace, combined tulips, narcissus, jonquils and Phillips flowers in a triangular arrangement suggesting Oriental influence. Across a bouquet of primarily white flowers, Fisher added a diagonal line of red anemones to provide emphasis and balance.⁷⁸ This technique is also

⁷⁶ Patricia Kroh, "Flowers Arranged in the American Way," *House and Garden*, (April 1939) 38-9, 82-3.

⁷⁷ J. Gregory Conway, *Flowers: East-West*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1939) 151.

⁷⁸ *Flower Arrangements of Williamsburg*, (Williamsburg, VA: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Inc., 1953).

Japanese.⁷⁹ At least four other arrangements in the film confirm this trend.

Colonial Williamsburg's three principles for bouquet making all seem to have their origin in Japanese technique. They are:

1. The size, or *scale*, of the finished arrangement is determined by the space it will occupy. The size of the container determines the over-all size of the arrangement.
2. *Harmony* can only be achieved by keeping in mind the colors of the walls, the floor coverings, curtains, and upholstery. Both flowers and container should blend with the furnishings and become part of the over-all decoration of the room.
3. In a mass arrangement of different kinds of flowers, typical of the colonial period, the *design* is often a fan shaped outline. *Balance*, line, and a center of interest may be achieved both through color and through contrast of form and texture in plant material.⁸⁰

Evaluating color by considering the environment an arrangement will occupy is a Japanese idea. Even the fan or triangular shape comes directly from the three primary insertions in *moribana*.⁸¹

Because these Japanese principles have become so accepted in Western technique, it is easy to lose sight of their origins. However, these forces would not have not been a factor in the flower arrangements of American colonists. Ikebana has had great influence on twentieth-century practices, and had clear impact on the development of the "eighteenth-century manner" of arranging flowers practiced by the Colonial Revivalists.

⁷⁹ Sadler, 45.

⁸⁰ Dutton, 86.

⁸¹ Sadler, 53.

CHAPTER 4

Conclusions and Recommendations

In this current age of re-evaluation and re-interpretation of period installations, it is useful to know not only what is incorrect about our museum interiors, but why they were done incorrectly in the first place. The Colonial Revival was, in the words of one scholar, a period which "postulated a 'golden age' in America's past stretching from the Pilgrims' arrival at Plymouth Rock to the death of Thomas Jefferson."¹ Its influence was felt throughout the nation. Today, museums confront the Colonial Revival aesthetic and bring new scholarship to bear on it.

This study has attempted to examine how one element--flower arranging--was used in historic interiors during the Colonial Revival. Possibly because of its ephemeral nature, this element has apparently escaped the scrutiny while so many other aspects of museum furnishing have not. In most cases, as was clearly proven here, flowers were inappropriately displayed. Anne Leighton, a garden historian, has written, "How sad to pass such history by and furbish up historic houses with plants their own owners never knew. How sad, in passing, to miss the opportunity of understanding our country's founders through their gardens."² Perhaps we can learn not only from our founder's gardens, but from the gardens of those who romanticized them early in this century.

¹ Geoffrey L. Rossano, *Creating a Dignified Past: Museums and the Colonial Revival*. (Savage, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1991) vii.

² Anne Leighton, *Early American Gardens: "For Meate or Medicine,"* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1970) 16.

Flower arrangements are still present in many museum settings and we must be able to identify them for what they are. Edna Pennel, who replaced Louise Fisher at Colonial Williamsburg in 1953, once said of the Rockefeller restoration, "If you live here and soak up the atmosphere of colonial days, you inevitably come to express it in whatever you create."³ This was very true of Colonial Revival thought; if you believed in a romantic view of America's history, you would hardly want to face the sometimes not-so-pretty realities of the past. Pennel's perspective is still expressed every time a modern flower arrangement graces the interiors of a seventeenth- or eighteenth-century interior.

What should the historic site interpreter consider relative to flower use? The general history of cut flower use in American interiors is a broad topic deserving further research. But any historic site can research its own specific circumstances. Scott G. Kunst and Arthur O. Tucker, plant historians, offer suggestions on how to begin the search for authentic flowers:

A first step in identifying historically appropriate plants for a site - let's say flowers for an 1860s farmstead in Michigan - is to identify what had been introduced into cultivation by that time. A second step is to narrow this list of introduced flowers down to those that were actually available in - to continue the example - Michigan in 1860 (through plant peddlers, mail-order nurseries, neighbors, relatives, and so on). A third step is to identify which of these available flowers were actually common or popular in 1860. Then, of course, the

³ Joan Parry Dutton, *The Flower World of Williamsburg*, (Williamsburg, VA: The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1962) 95.

list would have to be shaped to the specifics of the site, its immediate context, and its 1860s residents.⁴

This research would be followed by documenting the arrangements with much the same approach, paying particular attention to any written accounts or visual images contemporary with the site.

If a museum has not yet investigated the specifics of the area's history of flower use, then it should refrain from using arrangements. If they are not used, they cannot be used inappropriately. If the choice is made to use flowers, and no research has been done to support their inclusion in the museum setting, then label them or have the tour guides discuss their introduction.

The flower arrangement of today exists within a completely different context than did its historical predecessors. In colonial America, plants, flowers, and ornament were thought of, looked at, and used very differently than they are today. In an era of modern convenience, it is difficult to comprehend the motivations of our ancestors. This must be kept in mind when interpreting a seventeenth- or eighteenth-century interior. In *Recreating the Historic House Interior*, the historian William Seale wrote:

Our personal taste attempts to assert itself more forcefully in the collection of ornaments than in anything else. From the perspective of today, most of the objects of the past are ornaments, whether they were originally so or not. While one hopes only restorers of interiors of the 1950's will opt for

⁴ Scott G. Kunst and Arthur O. Tucker, "Where Have All the Flowers Gone? A Preliminary List of Origination Lists for Ornamental Plants," *APT Bulletin*. no. 2 (1989) 43.

pepper mills with chintz lampshades or bidets planted with tuberous begonias, equal caution should be taken with treatments less obvious.⁵

We see the colonial period through the eyes of someone who lives in 1992, just as the Colonial Revival saw it through the eyes of the early twentieth century. While there is no longer any reason to use bouquets in colonial interiors, there is every reason to use them in interiors interpreting the Colonial Revival. Like the vast numbers of spinning wheels that once populated historic interiors, flower arrangements are a strong symbol and example of the Colonial Revival aesthetic. Once they are recognized as this, they can be dealt with in an appropriate way.

⁵ William Seale, *Recreating the Historic House Interior*, (Nashville, TN: American Association for State and Local History, 1979) 62.

Appendix One:
Museums Contacted for Information Regarding Flower Use in
Colonial-American Domestic Interiors

The following letter was sent to forty-eight sites interpreting colonial interiors. The sites were chosen for their location and date of interpretation. A sites also represent a variety of organizations of different sizes and levels of academic research.

Fall, 1991

Dear Curator,

I am presently researching the use of cut flowers in American interiors of the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries. I am trying to gather all relevant materials available to me. I am interested in the plants themselves, their containers, and their display and use. Do you use flowers in the interpretation of period interiors? If so, what documentation do you have to support this presentation? What flower were historically appropriate for your site and how were they arranged? Does your collection contain any specific sources that I might investigate?

To answer these questions I plan to use primary documentation, including paintings, prints, diaries, travel accounts, estate inventories, and surviving examples of containers.

I would greatly appreciate learning of any information you may have on these types of sources. It is for my master's thesis in Historic Preservation at the University of Pennsylvania. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Gay Elizabeth Vietzke

R= Response

1. American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, MA R
2. Antiquarian and Landmarks Society, Hartford, CT R
3. Belle Grove, Middletown, VA
4. Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY R
5. Casa Amesti, Monterey, CA R
6. City Life Museums, Baltimore, MD R
7. Cliveden, Philadelphia, PA R
8. Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, VA R
9. Connecticut League of Historical Societies, New Haven, CT R
10. Cooper-Hewitt Museum, New York, NY
11. Cooper-Molera Adobe, Monterey, CA
12. Daughters of the American Revolution Museum, Washington, DC
13. Dearborne Historical Museum, Dearborne, MI
14. Decatur House, Washington, DC R
15. Drayton Hall, Charleston, SC R
16. Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, DC R
17. Edward-Dean Museum of Decorative Arts, Cherry Valley, CA
18. Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco, San Francisco, CA
19. Garden in the Woods, Framingham, MA R
20. Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village, Dearborne, MI R
21. Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, Winterthur, DE R
22. Historic Deerfield, Deerfield, MA R
23. Historical Society of Early American Decoration, Brandon, VT R
24. J. Paul Getty Museum, Santa Monica, CA R
25. Library of Congress, Washington, DC R
26. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA R
27. Maine Historical Society, Portland, ME R
28. Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore, MD
29. Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, MA R
30. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY R
31. Monticello, Charlottesville, VA R
32. Montpelier, Montpelier Station, VA R
33. Mount Vernon, Mount Vernon, VA
34. Museum of American Architecture and Dec. Arts, Houston, TX
35. Museum of Early Southern Dec. Arts, Winston-Salem, NC R
36. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA R
37. Mystic Seaport, Mystic, CT
38. New York Historical Society, New York, NY
39. Newport Historical Society, Newport, RI

- | | |
|--|---|
| 40. Oatlands, Leesburg, VA | R |
| 41. Old Sturbridge Village, Sturbridge, MA | R |
| 42. Pennsbury Manor, Morrisville, PA | R |
| 43. Plimouth Plantation, Plymouth, MA | R |
| 44. Plymouth Antiquarian Society, Plymouth, MA | |
| 45. Shadows-On-The-Teche, New Iberia, LA | R |
| 46. Society for the Pres. of New England Antiquities, Boston, MA | R |
| 47. Storowton Village Museum, West Springfield, MA | |
| 48. Wadsworth Athenaeum, Hartford, CT | R |

Thirty-three out of forty-eight (68.75%) of the institutions responded.

Appendix Two:
Responses from Queries

The queries read:

The use of cut flowers in American interiors from the seventeenth through the nineteenth century is the subject of a study by Gay Elizabeth Vietzke. Paintings, engravings, and other images are of interest.

Gay E. Vietzke
15 West Haycock Point Road
Branford, CT 06405

A= *The Magazine Antiques*
H= *History News Dispatch*

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. Cynthia Brandimarte, Historian | A |
| Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Austin, TX | |
| 2. Norman Walz | A |
| Union, NJ | |
| 3. Jeanne Niccolls, Collections Administrator | A |
| Fairfax County Park Authority, Fairfax, VA | |
| 4. Stuart P. Feld, President | A |
| Hirschl & Adler Galleries, Inc., New York, NY | |
| 5. Susan Jackson, staff | H |
| Historic Camden, Camden, SC | |

Appendix Three:
Inventory References

The following information was compiled from the studies of inventories conducted by graduate students in the Preservation Program, University of Pennsylvania, on file at The Athenaeum of Philadelphia. All references come from Philadelphia inventories, unless otherwise noted, and the original documents can be found at the Office of Wills, City Hall, Philadelphia.

Citations will take the following form:

date	decendent, occupation	city, if not Phil.
location in residence	item	value

The Eighteenth Century

1767:98	Benjamin Shoemaker, merchant	
Kitchen	"Flower Box and Candlestand"	L1.6
1770: 516	Robert Montgomery, merchant	
Kitchen	"6 Flower Glasses"	L..5..
1774:52	Lynford Lardner, Esquire	
Chamber up 2pr. Stairs	"10 Flower Pieces"	L..5.0
1775:113	Henry Robinson, shopkeeper	
Up Stairs, Back Room	"1 Old China Bowl, 5 Flower Pots"	L.7.
1780:	Jacob Harmon, merchant	Upper Darby, PA
Parlor	"2 Stone Flower Pots"	

Total	Forty-nine inventories consulted.
	Five references to flowers (10%).

The Nineteenth Century

1801:66	Elizabeth Lawrence, widow of former Phil. mayor	
Front Rm up 2pr. Stairs	"2 Flower Pots"	\$.50
1801:3006	J. Burroughs, merchant	
Parlor	"3 flower pots, oil table cloth	L.4.-
1841:	Thomas U. Walter, architect	
Parlor?	"2 Vases of flowers"	\$22.00
1851:215	S. Pilling	
Kitchen	"Flower pots on Mantle"	\$.75
1857:28	H. Rihl	Northern Liberties
Front Attic	"1 Flower Stand"	\$.50
3rd St. Front Rm	"1 Flower Stand"	\$.50
Bathroom	"flowers"	\$3.00
Parlor	"1 Flower Stand"	\$20.00
1859:15137G	E. Morris	Newark, NJ
2nd St. North Front Rm	"2 China Flower Pots"	\$4.00
1859:15219G	A. Gifford	Newark, NJ
Cellar	"flower stand"	\$.75
1860:177	M. W. Dale	
Parlor	"Bouquet of Immortelles"	\$.50
1862:168	H. E. Drayton	
2nd St. Dressing Rm	"2 Flower Vases"	\$.25
1866:16411G	W. Wright	Newark, NJ
Dining Room	"1 Flower Vase"	\$3.00
1881:499	J. S. Lovering Sr., sugar refiner	
Parlor	"1 Gilt & Glass ornamented flower stand w/ pampas"	
Back Rm North	"2 Plated & Cut Glass flower vases"	
1882:503	G. S. Baker, farmer	Frankford, PA
Sitting Room	"1 Flower Stand"	\$.25

1885:10	A. Elton, Esquire		
Cellar	"Flower Pots"		\$.50
1886:16109	I. Shoemaker, farmer	Norristown, PA	
misc.	"flowers"		\$12.00
1893:Doc. C, Vol. 3	H. Painter, businessman	Chester Co., PA	
3rd St. Front, West Side	"2 Globes of wax Flowers"		\$3.00
1893:Doc. E, Vol. 3	W. Butt, farmer	Schuylkill Township, PA	
Cellar	"1 Flower Stand"		\$.50

Total One hundred three inventories consulted.
 Twenty references to flowers (19%).
 Seventeen of the twenty were from after 1850 (85%).

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Key to Rare Book Repositories

A= Athenaeum of Philadelphia	C=Colonial Williamsburg Foundation
F=Free Library of Philadelphia	H=Historical Society of Pennsylvania
L=Library Company of Philadelphia	P=Pennsylvania Horticultural Society
S= American Philosophical Society	U=University of Pennsylvania Libraries
W=Winterthur Museum Library	Y=Beinecke Library, Yale University

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